Identity, Religion, and the State: Haredi Politics and Social Change in Israel

MUNRO, HEATHER,LOUISE

Heather L Munro

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This thesis is about religion and the state. The ethnography is based on fieldwork conducted in Israel with Haredi (ultra-orthodox) women, mainly in the performing arts community and in the women's rights activist groups. The thesis demonstrates that Haredi identity formed as a resistance to secularising forces, and through negotiations with secular power structures and the state became an entwined political-religious identity. I argue that through constant negotiations of religious ethics with secular values and the state of Israel, Haredim are picking apart their political identities from their religious ethics, and these choices insinuate implications for the nature of the role of religion and Jewish identity in the state of Israel in the future. I place women at the centre of this negotiation, and attribute much of these changes to the agency of Haredi women, with a wealth of ethnographic examples.

This thesis contributes to understandings of the relationship between the secular state and religion by suggesting that the state may expect a specific type of religious citizen, and that in order for religious minorities like Haredim to resist the state, more stringent observance is produced. I suggest that not only are religious citizens capable of critique, that they critique the state through religious choices, and critique their own societies in ways which are designed to produce more resilient forms of religious ethics and community. The agency which is used is pious in its ethics, but it allows for the inclusion of certain secular forms of knowledge in order to bolster religious life. The thesis also offers an exploration of religious women's feminism which applies liberal secular feminist goals to parts of life outside the direct dictates of religion, and in doing so curtails the authority of patriarchal religious leaders in a religiously ethical way. Furthermore, this thesis explores the experiences and contributions of Sephardi and Mizrahi Haredim, and discusses them as central to political and social change in the Haredi world.

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Heather Louise Munro

PhD Anthropology

Department of Anthropology

Durham University

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Please Note: I mix Ashkenazi and Sephardi pronunciations of Hebrew, choosing the most commonly used form from my ethnography. This thesis includes Modern and Biblical Hebrew, Yiddish, and Aramaic words.		
TERM	DEFINITION	FORMS
Agudat Yisrael	a Haredi political party, see Chapter Two	
aguna	A woman who is being denied a divorce by her husband (f s.)	agunot (f pl.)
akeida	lit. 'bound', implying relinquishing control to God	
aliyah	lit. 'going up', term used for Jews who immigrate to Israel through the Right of Return	
amutah	NGO, a non-profit non-governmental organisation	
Ashkenazi	used to refer to the Jews of Northern, Central, Eastern Europe	
Avodah	lit. 'Work', the name of the Israeli Labour Party	
ayn od milvado	expression: there is none besides God	
Ba'al Shem Tov	lit. 'Master of the Good Name', founder of the Hasidic movement	Besht
ba'al teshuvah	lit. 'master of repentance', used to refer to those who were raised less- or non-religious and chose to become observant in their adult life (m s.)	ba'alas teshuvah (f s.), ba'alei teshuvah (m pl.), ba'alos teshuvah (f pl.)
bagrut	Israeli high school diploma	
Bais Ya'akov	worldwide system of Haredi girls' schools, for more information please see Seidman 2019.	Beis Yaakov, Beit Yaakov, other spelling variations
balagan	chaotic mess	
Baruch Hashem	lit. 'Bless God', common interjection	
bat ayin	lit. 'daughter of the eye', the children of God	
bli ayin hara	lit. 'without the evil eye', used to fend off bad luck	
Chardal	a combination of 'Haredi' and 'Dati Leumi', used for Jews who are both extremely religious and extremely Zionist	Chardali
chas v'shalom	Expression: 'have mercy' 'heaven forbid'	
chasan	groom, husband-to-be	
chasuna	wedding	
cheider	Hasidic primary school for boys	

chesed	lit. ‘kindness, caring, compassion’, used for charity; either charity organisations or charitable activities.	
Chochmat Nashim	A women’s rights organisation	
chug	after school elective activity (s.)	chugim (pl.)
chuppah	wedding canopy	
chutzpah	brazenness, audacity, gutsiness	
Dati Leumi	National Religious, Religious Zionist	
daven	pray, often used as a verb with English conjugation in vernacular Jewish English	
Degel HaTorah	a Haredi political party that typically represents Litvish interests	
Eidah HaChareidis	see p. 43	
Eretz Yisrael	lit. ‘the land of Yisrael’, used in Haredi vernacular as a replacement for Israel	
erev	lit. ‘evening’, used to refer to the day before a particular event, when counted from sunset to sunset; i.e., ‘erev Shabbos’ is from sunset Thursday to sunset Friday, when Shabbos begins	
frum	Yiddish word for ‘religious’, used more readily than other labels for self-definition in both the Haredi world and other communities	*frum* from birth
gemach	a free-loan society, usually themed around specific objects	
HaBayit HaYehudi	‘The Jewish Home’ political party	
hakaras hatov	expression: ‘recognising the good’	
halacha	Jewish law	
Haredi	loosely translates to ‘ultra-orthodox’, see Chapter Two, (s.), (adj.)	Haredim (pl.)
Hashem	lit. ‘the name’: God	
hashkafa	commonly translated to ‘outlook,’ but more complex, encompassing ‘approach’ and ‘theology’ as well; used in vernacular Jewish English	
Haskallah	the Jewish Enlightenment	
heter	a piece of rabbinical guidance, a rabbinic ruling, rabbinic allowance (s.)	hadracha (pl.)
hineni	expression: ‘here I am’	
hishtadlus	the idea that God only helps those who have already done their best	
kallah	bride	
kedusha	holiness	

kippah	yarmulke, skull cap	kippot
kol isha	see p. 72	kol b'isha erva
kollel	yeshiva for adult male full-time study	
Likud	lit. 'consolidation', the political party to which Netanyahu belongs	
Litvish	'Lithuanian', used for non-Hasidic Ashkenazi Haredim; also known as *misnagdim*, Litvak	
Lo Nivcharot Lo Bocharot	see p. 226	
maidele	Yiddish for little girl	
mamlachtiyut	'State-ism'	
mandatim	mandates, the groupings of representative votes in the Israeli democratic system	
mashgiach	kosher supervisor	
mechozi	'regional', used in regional court	
mehadrin	seal which indicates the highest level of kosher supervision	
melave malka	lit. 'escorting the Queen', a joyful event at night after the Sabbath has ended to prolong the feeling of the Sabbath	
minhag	custom, practice, or tradition	
minyan	quorum necessary for prayer	
Mishpacha	lit. 'Family', the name of a popular magazine	
misnagdim	see Litvish	
Mizrahi	see p. 74	
Moshiach	'Messiah'	
nashim/neshot	women	
Neshot Agudat Yisrael	The Women of Agudat Yisrael, a committee within the party	
nisayon	struggle, trials and tribulations (s.)	nisyonos
Nivcharot	see p. 224	
olim	Jewish immigrants to Israel	
parnassah	livelihood or economic survival	
pikuach nefesh	'saving a life', a principle in Judaism	
Rabbanit	a Rabbi's wife who is respected for her wisdom in her own right	
Rabbi	lit. 'teacher', Jewish spiritual and religious leader, who is ordained through *smicha* (s.)	rabbanim (pl.). rebbe (rabbi who leads a Hasidic sect), Rav
Rabbanim	see rabbi	
schnorrer	beggar	
Sephardi	see p. 74	

Shabbat/Shabbos	the Sabbath; begins before sunset on Friday, and ends after sunset on Saturday	
Shabbaton	a Sabbath spent as a group with special programming, often in a special location	
shacharis	morning prayer	
shadchan	matchmaker	
shalom courts	small courts in Israel, the lowest level	
Shas	the Sephardi Haredi political party	
Shechinah	the female in-dwelling of God	
sheirut leumi	national service (an alternative to army service for religious non-Haredi girls)	
sheitel	wig	
shidduch	marriage match (s.)	shidduchim (pl.)
shiur	lecture (s.)	shiurim (pl.)
shlichut	commission	
shomer ani	'the keeper of me'	
shomer negiah	keeping a commitment not to touch people of the opposite sex except one's spouse (for both men and women)	
shpiel	play (s.)	shpiels (pl.)
shtark	severe, harsh, strict	
shtiebel	a small room used for prayer	
siddur	prayer book	
simcha	joy	
Simchas Torah	holiday, celebrating the beginning of a new liturgical year	
smicha	rabbinical ordination or certification	
Tanach	the Hebrew Bible	
tatti	Daddy	
tefilla	prayer (s.)	tefillin (pl.), also used for the phylacteries
tikkun olam	healing the world	
Tkuma	a political party, Religious Zionist in orientation	
Torahni	see Chardal	
tsnius	see p. 66	
tsurah	troubles	
tzedakah	money given to the needy	
tzomet	crossroads	
tzviut/tzvuah	hypocrisy	

Ubizchutan	Ruth Colian's political party, see p.	
veib	wife	
yeshiva	Jewish hall of study	
yetzer hara	evil inclination	
yichud	lit. 'seclusion', refers to the *halacha* prohibiting an unmarried man and woman from being alone together, lest they commit adultery	
yichus	see p. 84	

Portions of this thesis have been published in the following article:

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Within this thesis, the following portions are taken from that article:
Chapter Three: portions of p. 72-75, and portions of p. 101-103
Chapter Five: p. 175-191, with some minor changes and additions
Chapter Six: portions of p. 216-218

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Chapter One: Introduction

As I write this, bombs are falling in Gaza and rockets are being struck from the sky by the Iron Dome. Headlines tell us the Cabinet is debating a ceasefire; no word yet as to whether or not that will come to fruition. This has provided grim relief from another tragedy: the accident at Mount Meron on Lag B'Omer, a holiday that this year fell on the thirtieth of April. The rains continued much later than expected this year in Israel; normally this is a blessing, but on Meron it made the narrow stone steps treacherous. Someone slipped, and the crowds of men were thrown into a stampede which left forty-five men dead and over one hundred and fifty men seriously injured in hospital. The current flare up in the greater conflict with the Palestinians has distracted me from pouring over the Meron news articles in fear: fear that I would see a name or a face I recognised from fieldwork, for the Meron disaster happened to the Haredi community, the community that I have been researching for almost a decade.

The general public is very aware of one of the conflicts in the Holy Land today: the Palestinian Israeli conflict makes worldwide headlines every time another flare up occurs. But the country of Israel is rife with conflicts of all kinds, and each of these conflicts affect each other. One of the most significant conflicts is that of the secular versus the religious; another is the conflict between Nationalist-Religious ideology and ultra-orthodox ideology, the ideology of the Haredim. Both the secular and the National Religious Israelis view the Haredi community as the ultimate 'other'. They are Jews who are too religious to be acceptable to the non-religious, and too resistant to nationalism to be acceptable to the other religious Jews. They have been transformed into a pariah, the antithesis of what it is to be a

proper citizen of Israel (Dalsheim 2019) and the opposite of what it is to be a 'good Jew' (Efron 2003). After the tragedy at Meron, I was thus also fearful of encountering the usual vitriol from the Israeli public that is often projected at Haredim in the press following any publicity surrounding a Haredi event. 'Haredim, *parasitim*' (Dalsheim 2019, 139) is a not uncommon utterance by non-Haredim who encounter me in the street when I am working in the field: I dress to adhere to the standards of the community in which I work.

Israel is a site in which the theoretical abstracts which dominate anthropological scholarly discourse today become unrefined, materialised facts which are not only inevitable, but they are part of the overt rhetoric of state-making. In Anthropology, we theorise the secular and the religious binary, the violence of the state on bodies and persons, and the performance of nationalism (Asad 2003, Billig 1995). In Israel, people talk about their religious selves and the secular Other (or vice-versa) (Avishai 2008), and in order to be Israeli, one must literally serve in the army where bodies and selves are violently shaped into citizenship (Lavie 2018). Joseph suggests that in academia,

> 'One thing is in dispute: namely, what we mean by 'politics'. In everyday usage, it signifies what politicians do, affairs of the state [sic], just as Aristotle assumed and as the etymology of the word politics [sic] (from the Greek polis 'city, state' [sic]) suggests. On the other hand, 'office politics', 'sexual politics' and the like have become perfectly common vernacular phrases, so it is not just in academic parlance that we find a broader application of the political to any situation in which there is an unequal distribution of power, and where individuals' behaviour reflects the play of power, or is guided (or maybe even determined) by it.' (Joseph 2006, 2)

In Israel, the subtler politics of religion and gender are blatantly inseparable from the Aristotelian politics of the state, the Left, and the Right. 'Secular' is part of Israeli discourse, and not imposed by academics in these pages. People in Israel *do* politics through a direct negotiation with these binary oppositions of 'the secular' and 'the religious', especially women in the Haredi world.

Writing this has been a race; Lefkowitz notes, 'At home in the United States I felt distant

from the ever-changing subject of my research— as if it were slipping away from me…. The Middle East is so dynamic and so turbulent that "the present" rapidly becomes "the past"' (Lefkowitz 2006, 4). Indeed, when I first arrived home from the field, I had initially envisioned this work as being structured around the momentous general election of April 2019. But before I knew it, that election was declared null and void, and since then three further elections have been held within the space of two years. Today, even as I am preparing to submit this to examiners, I had to edit a mention of Yair Lapid because his role in the government and party affiliation continually shift. 'But all societies are constantly changing, and the ethnographic project is best understood as an attempt to capture culture as a process, rather than as an object' (Ibid.), and the same is true for this ethnography, and this society. The question remains: amid this change, how have the Haredim become what they are, and what is the future of the Haredim in the state of Israel?

Background Information

The Haredi sector is currently the fastest growing segment of the population in Israel. Haredi birth rate surpassed that of Arab-Israelis nearly a decade ago, and while flagging slightly in the last several years, is persisting at levels well above the rising secular Jewish birth rate and the steady National Religious fertility. In 2017, there were approximately 1,033,000 Haredim in Israel, comprising 12% of the population; 50% of the Haredi population was under the age of 16 ('Statistical Report' 2018, 4-5). The Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research anticipates that Haredim will constitute 16% of the Israeli population by 2030, and be 2,000,000 strong by 2033 (Ibid., 6). 'Haredi' is usually translated to 'ultra-orthodox' in English, but a more accurate definition would be, 'those who tremble before God.' Haredi identity includes Hasidic groups and Litvish or *misnagdim*. These groups and their differences are explored in more detail in Chapter Two. 'Haredi' is one of many labels

which are used with much significance and meaning in Israel today. Other labels used in this thesis are *Dati Leumi* and Chardal. *Dati Leumi* literally means National Religious; these are the Religious Zionists, a significant proportion of the population of Modern Israel, and generally less strictly observant and more Zionist than the Haredim. Chardal is an acronym-label which is a contraction of the words Haredi *Dati Leumi*. Thus the Chardal are those who are extremely religious and extremely Zionist. Chardal may be perceived as somewhat of a pejorative; it is not my intention to use it as such, but I feel forced to choose Chardal over the alternative, Torani, for fear of confusion with the *Ma'ayan HaChinuch HaTorani* school system.

The Haredi educational system is discussed fairly often in this thesis, and so I feel obliged to provide some background for the reader. Boys and girls are educated separately in the Haredi world; for primary school, boys attend a *cheider* if they are Hasidic, and a Talmud-Torah if they are not, and then go on to a high school *yeshiva* for the equivalent of Years 10-13. Following high school, men study in a *yeshiva*, a Jewish educational institution which focuses on the study of religious texts. Girls also attend religious schools, the majority of which are part of the *Beis Yaakov* school network. Some Hasidic girls attend schools specific to their sect instead of *Beis Yaakov*, but the curriculum will be influenced by *Beis Yaakov* even there. The first *Beis Yaakov* was founded in Krakow in 1917, and it is now the predominant network of Jewish religious girls' schools throughout the world, with a presence on five continents. To learn more about *Beis Yaakov*, see Naomi Seidman's recent book, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement* (2019). Tamar El-Or also discussed *Beis Yaakov* in Israel and Ger Hasidic women's education in her book *Educated and Ignorant* (1994). In addition to these school systems for girls, there is also the *Ma'ayan HaChinuch HaTorani* school system for Sephardi girls. Opened by Shas, the Sephardi Haredi political party, in the 1980s, it offers an alternative for non-Ashkenazi (see below for explanation)

Haredi girls who are excluded from *Beis Yaakov*.

Literature Review and Contribution to Scholarship

While this dissertation is based on ethnography with women, it is not a dissertation about women. Rather, the women's voices in this work are considered to be just as able to speak for their whole community as men would be in other ethnographies. It has never seemed right that women's ethnography is considered a 'special interest' in anthropology, but ethnography with men is considered representative. As a woman who conducts fieldwork in a conservative religious society, and therefore only has access to other women within this community, I have on occasion felt anger that I have to address the question of 'Why women?' when it seems that men never must ask, 'Why men?' I simultaneously feel that as a woman researching women, I still have great difficulty having my work and research taken seriously, especially within the scholarly areas of the state, religion, and politics which I investigate. 'Clutching her pencil, she wonders how "the discipline" will view the writing she wants to do. Will it be seen as too derivative of male work? Or too feminine? Too safe? Or too risky? Too serious? Or not serious enough? Many eyes bore in on her, looking to see if she will do better or worse than men, or at least as well as other women' (Behar 1995, 2). Though these words were written over twenty-five years ago, I sometimes feel little has changed.

This dissertation is about Haredi society; more specifically, it is about Haredi identity, religion, and the state. The voices heard in the ethnography are predominantly those of women, with one or two exceptions, and they represent women's understandings of themselves, their identities, their community, and the national and international context in which they live. Perhaps, like Lila Abu-Lughod in *Writing Women's Worlds* (1993), this dissertation can function as a critique of other ethnographies which take men's voices for

granted (Abu-Lughod 1993, xvi). In relying on ethnography with women to inform me as effectively as ethnography with men, I am perhaps trying to right past wrongs committed by the academy (Behar 1995, 17-21). I do, however, acknowledge that in a culture which so strictly separates women's and men's spaces in the community, excluding a men's perspective could leave me with certain profound blind spots. Thus, this dissertation relies heavily in parts upon Nurit Stadler's *Yeshiva Fundamentalism* (2009). This is an ethnographic exploration of manhood and masculinities in Israel's *yeshiva* students during the first decade of this century. Stadler describes men in crisis, who feel increasingly emasculated by the demands of the Haredi lifestyle in the context of a country which invests in a militaristic type of masculinity. The crisis which Stadler details is the same crisis which arose in my ethnography, and because her work was in the same communities as where I conducted research, it makes sense to include Stadler's research when I am lacking the men's perspective. In addition, I use some statistical reports on *yeshiva* attendance, secular education, and employment in order to more fully develop my understanding of Haredi society in Israel today.

Joyce Dalsheim's recent book, *Israel Has a Jewish Problem* (2019), does not focus solely on Haredim, but includes them in her examination of the state of Israel today and the relationship of religion and the state. She proposes that Haredim are the 'indigenous Jews' of Israel (Dalsheim 2019, 118-119), because they espouse a purer form of religious observance, unadulterated by Zionism, and because there were Haredim in the Holy Land before the arrival of Zionists. Dalsheim argues that the state projects of integration are a form of indigenous eradication (Ibid., 124). Dalsheim suggests that the Haredim are one thing, and Isrealiness is another, and integration in any form is an eradication of essential 'Haredi-ness'. This presents a two-fold problem, especially in the context of my research. It creates an 'either/or' dichotomous relationship between Haredi-ness and Israeliness, and it denies the

possibility that the secular and the religious can reside together within a single identity. Talal Asad (2003) was the first to warn of the dangers of creating a false dichotomy between the secular and the religious, and to remind us that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In this dissertation, I examine the negotiation of both the secular and the religious within Haredi identity.

This dissertation explores the relationship between the secular and the religious. Talal Asad brought the question of *Formations of the Secular* to the forefront of the anthropology of religion in 2003; in this he investigates the origins of secularism in Western Reformation philosophy, and suggests that the secularising project is essentially a violent repackaging of the colonialist project. Saba Mahmood also contributed significantly to understandings of the relationship between the secular and the religious in her 2016 work *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*. In this, Mahmood explores the secularisation process of the Egyptian state, and examines how secularism actually exacerbates issues of religious difference, and in fact creates a more hostile environment for religious minorities. Mahmood and Asad both assert that secularism ultimately led to the question of minority rights, because the position of minorities became more precarious in a secular society. In considering the relationship between the secular and the religious, I also include the works of historians Gershon Bacon and Noah J. Efron. Bacon's history of *Agudat Yisrael*, a religious and political organisation, in Poland describes it as a project to maintain the purity of tradition. He also discusses the advent of *Da'as Torah* as a way of extending rabbinical power over elements of life which were previously not considered regulated by rabbinic rulings. Efron explores the history of the Haredi encounter with Zionists and secularism in the Holy Land before the founding of the state of Israel. I suggest that the Haredi identity forms as a religious minority identity in response to the secular, and through the formation of *Agudat Yisrael* and the investment in the concept of *Da'as Torah*, create an enmeshment between the political and the religious.

My exploration of the relationship between the religious and the secular is to suggest that religious minorities transform their religious identities into political identities in order to resist the secular.

This thesis focuses on the question of the relationship between religion and the state. Mahmood (2016) and Asad (2003) both claim, based on the writings of Hannah Arendt, that sovereignty became the central question in determining the protection for minority groups after World War II. 'Minority rights' were transformed into 'human rights', and the only way to ensure one's own community's human rights were protected was to form a nation-state which could protect the group's interests (Mahmood 2016; Asad 2003). The inevitable product of secularism's removal of religion from the public sphere was the growth of nationalism (Asad 2003). However, Asad also suggests to us in his more recent book that we should not assume that the liberal project of secularism necessarily produces 'liberal' states—for indeed, secularist projects have also given birth to fascism and the Far Right (Asad 2018). Mahmood's *Religious Difference in a Secular Age* (2016) explores the question of the relationship between religion and the state in terms of the Coptic Christian minority in Egypt. She found that secular governance led to an exacerbation of religious tensions because the state produces new forms of difference and intensifies existing inequalities (Mahmood 2016). Yael Navaro-Yashin explores similar issues in Turkey in her book *Faces of the State* (2002), and discovered that sometimes it served people for the state to be secular, and sometimes it served people for the state to be religious, but that nationalism invaded both the secular and the religious in 'fuzzy' ways (Navaro-Yashin 2002).

There is significant literature on the relationship between religion and the state specifically in Israel. Dalsheim (2019) and Efron (2001) both suggest that the state of Israel demands Jewishness of its citizens, but that only specific types of Jewishness are acceptable. Haredi Jewishness is not the correct type. Yaakov Yadgar also explores the question of the

future of the state of Israel and its Jewish identity, but his work does not consider the question of the Haredim (Yadgar 2020). Smadar Lavie and Ella Shohat both discuss being the right kind of Jew, a type of Jew which is formed in opposition to Arabness and in alignment with Europeanness, extensively; Lavie makes this the subject of her book *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel*, while Shohat's works on the topic are too numerous to list singly. Some have written about the relationship between the state and religion in terms of immigration in Israel, and the process of conversion to which some are subjected. Yulia Egorova discussed the need for the Bene Menashe to become certain types of Jews, both in order to become citizens, but also in order to be accepted because of their ethnicity (Egorova 2015). Michal Kravel-Tovi's recent book *When the State Winks* (2017) concerns the conversion process of post-Soviet immigrants, and how, by superficially fulfilling the requirements of the religious conversion, the state of Israel actually seeks to transform post-Soviet immigrants into proper Zionists (Kravel-Tovi 2017). Daniel Lefkowitz writes concerning the negotiation of religious minority identity through language politics in his book *Words and Stones: The Politics of Language and Identity in Israel* (2006), which concerns Arab minority language use. Simeon D. Baumel's book *Sacred Speakers: Language and Culture Among the Haredim in Israel* (2006) also uses language as a foil with which to explore the position of Haredim as a religious minority in Israel. Ben Kasstan's work on Haredim in England explores health choices as ways in which a religious minority resist the state in *Making Bodies Kosher* (2019). In this dissertation, I argue that Haredim in Israel negotiate with the state and this gradually shapes new types of Haredi political identities.

When discussing religion and the secular state, it is also necessary to consider the question of critique, and the capacity for, and purpose of, critique within the religious community. Michel Foucault first suggested that critique was necessarily secular because it required reason, which suggests that those who are religious are fundamentally unreasonable

(Foucault 1997). Asad, Mahmood, Wendy Brown, and Judith Butler responded in vehement opposition to this supposition in their 2013 book, *Is Critique Secular?*. Through a series of essays formed as responses to both Foucault and each other, these authors suggest that critique is entwined with criticism, but more meaningful than criticism, in that it suggests an engagement with epistemology in terms of self-reflection and self-meaning-making (Asad 2013b). Critique produces new phenomena, and interrogates categories (Ibid.). Thus, critique is an active process in society, and it exists in religious life as well as secular. Asad supports his argument with examples from Islamic scripture. Since *Is Critique Secular?*, the question of critique has been further explored in the context of Islam by both Irfan Ahmad in *Religion as Critique* (2017) and Rachel Rinaldo (2014). Both of these investigations have been in terms of Muslim practices of scriptural reasoning and critique. Fader's recent work *Hidden Heretics* (2020) concerns critique in the Haredi world to a certain extent, as it examines the use of technology and those who have lost their faith. Stephanie Wellen Levine's book *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merry-Makers* (2003) could be viewed as an exploration of critique in that the Hasidic teenage girls who are the subject of the book are questioners; some leave the community, and some stay. To date, however, there has been little exploration of critique in the Jewish religious world. Furthermore, critique has almost universally applied to the logic of religion itself, in terms of scriptural reasoning. While it necessarily exists in the Jewish world in this form, because the very nature of Jewish Torah study relies on disagreement and discussion, I explore critique in terms of its role in religious society. Asad clearly suggests that critique plays a role in meaning-making and epistemology; critique is thus a necessary precursor to the negotiations around identity which this dissertation concerns. I explore critique in terms of the everyday; the critiques of society and tradition which take place not in order to leave religious society, but in order to perpetuate and reproduce religious society and religious identity in constantly changing forms.

Necessary to the consideration of critique is the question of agency; indeed, agency is central to my argument in this thesis. Saba Mahmood introduced the concept of agency in her book *Politics of Piety* (2005). Through ethnography conducted with the women of the Mosque Movement in Egypt, Mahmood suggested that religious women invest in different types of ethics and formations of the self, and through these formations of piety, they are able to achieve changes in their lives. Though their choices may not seem liberal or similar to those which people outside of their circumstances would understand, these women nonetheless possessed agency to operate in ways which helped them achieve their goals. Most importantly, this conception of agency lays aside any application of European or secular values, and centred understanding of religious women in their own contexts. Mahmood's work was built on the foundations of the work done by Abu-Lughod in *Writing Women's Worlds* (1993) and *Veiled Sentiments* (1986), which brought the experiences of religious women to the fore and suggested that hidden types of power existed for women in places which the West assumed were entirely oppressive. Some work has been done concerning agency in the Jewish world. Orit Avishai conducted research with Modern Orthodox women in Israel and argued that they used their agency to perpetuate religious goals (2008). Ayala Fader discussed the agency of Hasidic mothers in raising daughters in her book *Mitzvah Girls* (2009). More recently, Michal Raucher has published on Haredi women's agency in fertility and choices around childbirth in Israel in *Conceiving Agency* (2020). Skinazi has written about religious Jewish women's agency in the arts (2018), as has Lea Taragin-Zeller, more specifically focusing on teenage girls and the arts (2014). Though much of my own exploration of agency is in the performing arts space, I also explore Haredi women's agency in other realms. I argue that Haredi women invest in certain forms of piety in order to use their agency to negotiate the secular and the religious; they use their agency to critique certain forms of religious values and integrate secular knowledge to the advantage of

the future of the Haredi world. I view women's agency to negotiate the seemingly opposed ideas of 'the secular' and 'the religious' as central to the ongoing process of Haredi identity formation. I understand women's agency as a process of knitting together many strands from secular values with religious ethics, and indeed sometimes picking apart the tangle of religious stringencies within the Haredi world. My ethnographic data is furthermore extremely valuable to the greater scholarly field of women's agency, because of the richness, variation, and diversity of examples.

Critique, discussed above, is the counterpart of agency, for indeed one cannot exist without the other. Critique is important to the process of meaning-making understood in the negotiation of identity in which women engage. In this thesis, critique is envisioned as an effort to re-knit a portion of the scarf, which may involve unravelling a re-knitting with a combination of yarns. The re-knitting may appear similar, but the unravelling was part of a process of examination and reversal in order to re-make the scarf better than before. In this way, critique is not simply criticism, but rather a complex process of internal reflection and meaning-(re)-making.

This thesis is about identity. Identity is a complex idea with weighty intellectual baggage. Identity can refer to the amorphous categories of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, body (Vidal 2007), class, nationality, etc, variously. All of these have at some point been referred to as imaginary by leading scholars from Butler (1999) to Goodman et al. (2020), and indeed identity is itself an imaginary (Pratt 2003, 10). This does not, however, make it any less important of a concept to consider, or any less useful as an academic category, nor indeed any less *real* for our interlocutors (Goodman et al. 2020, 2). I take a constructivist approach to my understanding of identity (Ben-eliezer 2004), in which I understand that Haredim construct their identity over time (Pratt 2003, 10), as a minority at the margins (Ben-eliezer 2004, 256), in response to the oppositional 'other' (Pratt 2003, 10), and consolidated by the

specific contexts (Taylor 1992) of pre-war Europe and post-state Israel. In this way, I employ a similar approach of identity discourse as Pratt in his book *Class, Nation and Identity*, though I have freed my interpretation from Marxist class struggle. I initially develop an understanding of Haredi identity as increasingly bounded (Mizrachi et al. 2012, 438), but I appreciate the limits of extreme subjectivism (Taylor 1992, 521), and recognise my interlocutors' modernising instincts to 'escape the restrictions of the unitary self' (Ibid., 529) in the latter portion of this work. Though Haredi life lends itself to a generalised communal identity, because the emphasis is placed on participation rather than the individual as discussed in Chapter Three, I nonetheless do not want to obscure difference by over generalising Haredi identity as 'a people' (Pratt 2003, 6, citing Gellner 1983). Rather, I believe by the end of this thesis I have shown that there can be very little generalising about what it means to be Haredi. Identity, instead, is a starting point from which we can understand many forms of every-day resistance (Ben-eliezer 2004, 258, citing Scott 1985). Ben-Eliezer stresses the importance of using identity as a tool for understanding 'social fabric' (Ibid., 256), and indeed, this thesis uses the metaphor throughout of the 'scarf' of Haredi society. In sum, 'Its [identity's] importance lies in understanding… any society that is structurally fragmented and culturally pluralistic…. It represents a concept of "we-ness", of shared, mutual feelings between people, which are not stable, but always amenable to social negotiation and conflict' (Ibid.).

This thesis has a significant focus on activism; the voices of activists wind their way through these pages and speak to every aspect of Haredi life. I understand the activism which has arisen as a result of the types of agency which women possess in the Haredi world, and an inevitable extension of the discussion of agency. Naisargi Dave, Paolo Heywood, and Smadar Lavie have written on various types of activisms, especially concerning the relationship between the state and activism, and grassroots activists transformed into

legitimacy and thereby losing power. Heywood discusses the transformation of certain types of queer activism becoming less acceptable to the movement in a town in northern Italy as a result of certain types of legitimacy being granted activists (2018). Dave speaks to the 'NGO-isation' of the women's movement in India resulting in certain types of women's rights being acceptable, and others becoming unacceptable (2012). Lavie similarly criticises the NGO-isation of the Mizrahi Single Mothers' Movement in Israel, suggesting that the state's goals run counter to the goals of the movement (2018). The activists in this thesis are part of the Haredi Feminist Movement; I therefore also examine this activism in light of scholarship on feminism in different streams of Judaism. But unlike the Orthodox feminists of whom Blu Greenberg was a leader (1981), and the non-Orthodox Jewish feminists for whom Plaskow speaks of reclaiming a place in the Torah (1990), the Haredi feminists do not seek to apply feminist activism to religious life. In this way, the Haredi feminists are again doing the work of knitting strands of the secular liberal with the ethical fabric of Haredi ethics. The value in my study of feminists is threefold: Firstly, in the case of the Haredim, NGO-isation and legitimisation may be to the movement's advantage, which breaks the mould from other movements; secondly, the Haredi feminist movement is an example of a feminist movement which comes from a place of intersectional oppressions but does not (yet) espouse any intersectionalist goals; and finally, there is great value in being the first to document this movement at this nascent stage within the scholarly realm.

This thesis also includes a significant focus on non-Ashkenazim. Ashkenazi Jews are Eastern European Jews; non-Ashkenazi Jews includes Jews of any other background in the world. I use 'non-Ashkenazi' as opposed to Sephardi or Mizrahi, names used for Jews who are not Ashkenazi, as much as possible due to the clear scholarly disagreement about the choices of these words. This conundrum is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. There are two scholars who have made the most significant contributions to understandings of non-

Ashkenazim in Israel: Smadar Lavie and Ella Shohat. Both argue that Jews who have come to Israel from the Middle East and North Africa (which is the majority of non-Ashkenazim) are expected to constantly prove their Jewishness through investment in Zionism in order to clarify their separation from their Arab roots. Neither Lavie nor Shohat include Haredim in their scholarly work in any significant way. Therefore, my work represents some of the only scholarship on the non-Ashkenazi Haredi experience in Israel.

Because this thesis includes a special focus on non-Ashkenazim, the question of discrimination arises regularly. Goodman et al.'s newest edition of *Race: Are We So Different?* (2020) has been fundamental to underscoring the theory around racial discrimination and racism in this thesis. Much of what I describe falls under the category of 'cultural racism,' which Ben-Eliezer (2004) found to be the prevalent form of racism in Israel beginning in the 1980s, with the arrival of Ethiopian Jews. There are many similarities between the experiences of Ethiopian Jews in Ben-Eliezer's article and those of non-Ashkenazim in this thesis. In this thesis, I do understand discrimination to be based on race, not because there is any fundamental biological difference, but because race is the 'everyday way in which we interpret differences and invest meaning into them' (Goodman et al. 2020, 2). Ben-Eliezer states, 'Racism is a way of treating people and determining their destiny on the grounds of appearance, phenotypical differences, and "typical" characteristics, be they real or imagined' (Ben-eliezer 2020, 248). Ultimately, all discrimination discussed within these pages is based upon the colour of someone's skin, their characteristics, or their phenotypical differences as a result of a family heritage in North Africa, Latin America, or the Middle East. It is, therefore, racism.

Finally, this thesis contributes to scholarly work on *ba'alei teshuvah*, or those Jews who were raised less- or non-religious and chose to become religious later in life. *Ba'al teshuvah* literally means 'master of repentance,' and is the most common term used for those newly

religious people who choose the Haredi life. In Israel, *chozrim b'teshuvah* is sometimes used, but more often for a person who chooses to become *Dati Leumi* (Dalsheim 2019). Debra Kaufman's book *Rachel's Daughters* (1991) examines the lives and choices of *ba'alos teshuvah* in Boston, Massachusetts; she characterises them as anti-feminists. Sarah Bunin Benor has also studied the language of *ba'alei teshuvah* in the United States in her book *Becoming Frum* (2012). Not only do I study both English-speaking and Israeli *ba'alei teshuvah*, I contextualise them in the context of the Haredi community of which they are fully integrated members, and therefore view their presence, their values, knowledge, and choices, as part of the processes which the entire Haredi community is undergoing.

Argument

In this thesis, I argue that Haredi identity is a minority identity that formed in response to secularism and the state as an entwined religious-political identity; it is subjected to constant negotiations between the state, secular knowledge, and religious values, producing new types of Haredi political identities that present a range of implications for the future of the state of Israel.

The central question of this thesis therefore became:

What is the role of women in these changes, both political and social?

Other questions are implicated within this question. These include: How do Haredi women *do* politics? Indeed, if politics are inseparable from their religious identity, then asking how they do politics is asking how they do Haredi-ness. As mediators, literally pushed into the breach of this supposed opposition between the religious and the secular, how do Haredi women juggle this binary in creating and negotiating Haredi identity?

At the heart of these negotiations is the agency of Haredi women, who knit together strands of secular values and religious ethics in order to continuously transform the fabric of

Haredi identity and Haredi society. The Enlightenment created the production of a binary opposition between the secular and the religious, and the state and religious society. I argue that *Agudat Yisrael* formed as a negotiation with secularisation in order to protect religious ethics; *Da'as Torah* effectively transformed Haredi religious identity into a political identity. Under further pressure in the state of Israel, Haredim resisted the machinations of the state and secular influences as a religious minority responding to a secular state, and this caused increasingly stringent interpretations of Jewish law and tradition. Stringency, therefore, arises because of the oppositional state forced upon religious subjects by state secular values. However, the Haredim are in constant negotiation with these state and secular forces, and these negotiations lead to different articulations of secular and religious values existing simultaneously within Haredi identity. These negotiations are chiefly executed through the work of women. Haredi women have a great deal of agency, though it is a pious agency rather than a secular form of power. Because Haredi women's roles are centred upon protecting and shielding men and the community at large from the influences and temptations of the outside world, women have been cast as mediators between the secular sphere and the religious interior world. Haredi women critique their society and their culture constantly; individuals use agency to selectively absorb secular knowledge and values in order to benefit the community. I view these acts of agency as selecting strands of secular knowledge and values to knit into the fabric of Haredi society, and their critique as sometimes picking apart previous patterns of religious ethics. These stitchings and unpickings act as complex negotiations in the face of an untenable social binary. As these negotiations prove more complex, different sectors of the Haredi world clash with each other. These critiques and negotiations are resulting in a significant proportion of the Haredi world picking apart their political identity from their religious identity through a secularising, liberalising process. Some of these Haredim are aligning themselves with the values of the Left, and investing in

pluralism and socialism; others are aligning with the Right, and incorporating Zionism into their theological perspectives. The former wish to keep religion out of the state, the latter wish to incorporate religious values and ethics into the state. The choices that these Haredim make will have a significant impact on the future of the state of Israel.

Methods and Ethics

I conducted participant observation and informal interviews in Litvish, Hasidic, and non-Ashkenazi Haredi communities in Israel. I was based in Jerusalem, which was convenient for access to Beit Shemesh, El'ad, Bnei Brak, and communities in the West Bank; I also visited Haredi communities in Arad, Be'er Sheva, Rehovot, Petach Tikvah, Tiberias, Tsfat, and nearby areas in the north of Israel. The majority of my participant observation took place in performing arts rehearsals, classes, and performances. Within these spaces, the levels of 'participation' versus 'observation' varied; sometimes, I danced with the dance class at rehearsal, or sang with the chorus in a rehearsal of a musical, while the cast learned the music. My own interest in the performing arts has clearly informed some of the choices made in my research. I also conducted participant observation at women's *shiurim* [lectures] and attended campaign and political events connected with women's activism.

I spent extensive time conducting informal interviews with over fifty women. These interviews sometimes occurred in their homes; we also met in cafés, at restaurants, and often these interviews happened in gaps between teaching dance or rehearsing scenes. In these conversations, I tried not to guide the content of the conversation too much. Allowing women to speak freely, and control the flow of topics both built trust and rapport, and also allowed me to discover more about them than my internal biases and experiences would otherwise have allowed (Rosaldo 1986, 93-95). These interviews occurred with women as young as eighteen and old enough to be a great-grandmother; women who were single and married;

women who held no job, and women who have been in the newspaper and on television. I have anonymised my interlocutors as much as possible, using pseudonyms for most interlocutors, and changing insignificant details in order to further protect them from being revealed, should this project provoke ire from their fellow community members. Some women could not be pseudonymised or anonymised because of their high profile roles in politics, activism, or the performing arts. These women were offered a chance to be 'split', so that an 'anonymous Haredi woman' could share the views and experiences which they did not want associated with their public persona. Few chose to accept this offer.

There are several women who feature prominently throughout most chapters. These include both artists and activists, the majority of whom could not be anonymised. The first is Esther Goldman and her play *The Mask She Wears*. To anonymise Esther would be to deny her authorship of her work. I use her play as both an ethnographic analytical tool, and her perspective as playwright as its own form of ethnography. *The Mask She Wears* was well known within the performing arts circles in which I conducted research; most women who were old enough (either marriage or a certain age level is recommended for viewing) had either seen it in person or had since watched the DVD which is readily available. I would say it is widely watched within artistic women's circles; outside of the community of women interested in the arts it is less well known. The second woman is Lizzi Serling, whose song lyrics appear throughout this thesis and whose generous sharing of her art and her spirit will always remain meaningful to me. Though I spent time with multiple dance schools, I ultimately chose to focus on the school run by Rachel Factor and Lexie Koh. Rachel and Lexie are not anonymised despite the absence of any specific art reproduced in the thesis; this is because they wished to publicly have their views and approach to dance attributed to them and their dance school.

The other women who are not anonymised are activists. Michal Tchernovitsky's voice is

central to this thesis. She is a politician in the Israeli Labour Party, *Avodah*. Ruth Colian is also included. Ruth started the Haredi Women's Party, *Ubizchutan*. Finally, Esti Shushan is also a significant part of this project. She is the founder of the organisation *Nivcharot* and regularly appears to speak in the *Knesset*, the Israeli Parliament, and on television. A woman referred to as 'Bina', a pseudonym, also features prominently; she works in politics but not in a public-facing role, and so it was possible to conceal her identity somewhat more effectively.

I spent nearly two years studying Yiddish before beginning fieldwork; by the end of my time in Israel, I was wishing I had spent more time learning Modern Hebrew. A few interviews were conducted in Yiddish; the vast majority of my fieldwork was conducted in English. In the performing arts world, most rehearsals and classes were run with a mixture of English and Modern Hebrew, and some explanation between students in Russian. Ultimately, English did take me far; as I suggest elsewhere, English is becoming a substitute for Yiddish in certain parts of the Haredi world as a way of not participating in the Zionist project of Modern Hebrew (Munro 2022 forthcoming). However, a few of my key participants did not speak enough English to feel comfortable speaking with me without translation help. Translators represent complex ethical conundrums in anthropological fieldwork (Asad 1986). I therefore chose my translator carefully; she was someone whom I have known for years, and with whom I had already been discussing my thoughts and ideas as fieldwork occurred. She was interested in the project, but only out of pure curiosity: she volunteers with a variety of organisations in Israel, and the only population of which she has had no contact with through these organisations is the Haredi community. Furthermore, she has done extensive translation in both academic and non-academic settings. She was someone with whom I could discuss the connotations of a single word, and ask about the finer points of the science of translation. Most of all, she was someone who I could trust, and have trusted in the past.

She is not an academic, and she possesses one of the brightest wits I know.

Some of the biggest ethical quandaries I encountered during fieldwork involved a crisis of research ethics versus my own moral compass. I encountered racism and violence in the field; none of it toward me, but all of it offensive to my deepest held beliefs. 'When you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably' (Behar 1996, 16), Behar tells us; what about writing vulnerably about callousness? I was most surprised when encountering racism from some of the *ba'alos teshuvah* with whom I spoke. I expected some racism in a few (but definitely not all) people who grew up in such a self-contained world, but to encounter it in the newly religious people, some of whom had been heavily involved in anti-racist work before becoming religious, was surprising. What process could transform an activist who protested with the Black Panthers into a Hasidic woman who feared exposing her child to non-Ashkenazi Jewish children? I was also saddened to hear of and witness Haredi women and their families perpetrating violence towards their neighbours in the West Bank. In the pages that follow, especially in Chapter Seven, I have done my best to write vulnerably about violence and callousness to which I was witness. I must acknowledge my own discomfort: I am morally opposed to the settler movement and the Jewish occupation of the West Bank as a source of oppression, violence, and death to the Palestinian people. When I set out to conduct research with (originally) Hasidic women long ago, I intended to avoid Israel. When the only contacts which I could easily establish were in Jerusalem, I compromised with myself, because I naïvely believed that Haredim were not involved in the Palestinian conflict, nor the occupation. When it became clear that almost a third of my research participants lived in the settlements, I considered for a brief time excluding anyone who lived over the Green Line. Doing so would have certainly made my life easier from a bureaucratic perspective; I would have had to file significantly less paperwork for university required risk assessments. But ultimately I could not bring myself to exclude the experiences of such a significant

portion of my research community. To do so, especially based on my own internal biases, would be unethical. I also needed to give them a chance to show themselves to me free from my own judgments of their lifestyle (Clifford et al. 1986). Though this sometimes tested me in the most extreme ways, ultimately I found ways to manage my distress and allow them to continue to reveal themselves and their beliefs to me free of the sense of my judgment. The settlements in which they live are not listed, in order to further protect their safety. The question remains: What is our responsibility as ethnographers to the victims of the violence which our interlocutors produce?

I am mindful of my own identity as not only Ashkenazi, but also as someone who carries the white privilege of often passing for non-Jewish, when writing about the non-Ashkenazi women who were my interlocutors. This underscores my efforts to engage ethically when interrogating experiences of prejudice, discrimination, racism, and the resultant activism that has arisen. Lavie warns, 'Feminists who write and organize around intersectionality overlook the interplay between gender-race-class, religion, and bureaucracy' (Lavie 2018, 176). I hope that my efforts to 'decenter and rethink the normative frameworks by which we have come to apprehend life' (Mahmood 2016, 24) have not been in vain, and my work recognises the intersections to which Lavie calls attention.

Lefkowitz discusses the benefit of hindsight enriches his understanding of some of the first experiences in the field (2006, 32-33). In many ways, I didn't have to undergo the same shock of adjustment to which he refers, because I was conducting fieldwork in a place that once was home to me. My contacts were friends of friends, and before I started my masters at Oxford almost ten years ago, I was living in Har Nof, a Haredi community in Jerusalem, attending a seminary for *ba'alei teshuvah*. While this was not quite autoethnography, this was certainly a form of ethnography of the self, and fieldwork as homework (Lavie 2018, 20). My outside-inside status has allowed me to dive more deeply into this world; because I no longer

am a part of that community, my former membership no longer prevented women from being able to trust my confidentiality. I was outside enough to act as confessor; I was inside enough to be conversant in the cultural norms. My status as such elicited a range of reactions. One woman's reaction was revealing: she asked me how I could choose to become religious; she was born into it and had no choice, but why would anyone voluntarily become Haredi? Other women expected that I wanted to hear specific things; when I disabused them of these notions, they became more and more comfortable with me, and trust grew. Either way, I fear that this project may reveal far more about me than I realise, but perhaps that is as it should be.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter Two presents the argument that the Haredi identity formed as a political identity as well as a religious one in response to secularism and the state. It sets up the formation of the secular-religious binary opposition within society. I suggest that *Agudat Yisrael* formed as a political organisation in order to negotiate for Haredi minority rights in the face of secularism and nationalism. In order for a political organisation like *Agudat Yisrael* to exist and not become that which it was resisting, it had to be both a political and a religious entity. The investment in *Da'as Torah* was therefore born; this transformed rabbis into authorities on all matters, even non-religious matters. Thus, rabbis became politicians, and the political became religious. This translated into the Haredi identity becoming one in which the political and the religious were inseparable. This situation was only exacerbated in the state of Israel, where the Haredi community functioned as a religious minority, taking a stance in defense of its own interests. This translated into increasingly stringent interpretations of religious practice, in order to differentiate Haredi life from the society of the other Jews by whom the Haredim were now surrounded. Therefore, this dichotomy created by the birth of secular

thought, in which religion is the enemy of the secular state, has created more severe forms of religious life. Chapter Two continues by arguing that this increasing stringency resulted in *yeshiva* study being the main component of Haredi masculinity. This has meant that men and women have different roles in their negotiation of religious values and secular influence.

Chapter Three argues that the increasing stringency resulted in an increased emphasis on modesty for women, and this became one of the central features of pious Haredi womanhood. Understanding formations of Haredi women's piety is fundamental to understanding how women's agency operates, and why women are cast in the role of the knitters of the fabric of Haredi identity and society. The modesty focus has created particular conflict within the Haredi world concerning non-Ashkenazim, because modesty was defined by Ashkenazi standards. Thus, not only is modesty a central pillar of Haredi piety for women, it is a way in which non-Ashkenazim can be discriminated against. Chapter Three also argues that women are expected to be good mothers and wives, and support their husbands in *yeshiva*, by working outside the home and protected their children and husbands from secular knowledge and temptation. Finally, Chapter Three brings together the strands of both Chapter Two and Chapter Three to argue that Haredi identity is not anti-Zionist, but rather non-Zionist, and that women 'do' Haredi politics by not participating in certain state-making projects.

Chapter Four presents the major elements of change that have effected shifts in Haredi identity in the last decade. This includes a significant examination of *ba'alei teshuvah* and the effect which they have had upon Israeli Haredi society. Chiefly, they have shifted a fundamental element of Haredi identity: that religious identity is inseparable from political identity. The *ba'alei teshuvah* view their choice as a religious one, and generally view political beliefs and religious beliefs as separate but not mutually exclusive as a result of their secular upbringing. The *ba'alei teshuvah* bring change in terms of secular attitudes towards childrearing, health, and relationships. *Ba'alei teshuvah* also bring certain middle class,

suburban values to the Haredi community, such as appreciation for enrichment education, the arts, and sports. The introduction of these ideas is widely accepted in the Haredi world in Israel, somewhat more so for girls than boys.

Other changes explored in Chapter Four include improved secular education and the opening of Haredi campuses of mainstream universities. Secular education has improved for men, and more Haredi men are receiving higher degrees, while women's access to higher degrees appears to have remained steady. Another element of change is the housing crisis which all communities in Israel face, though the Haredim perhaps experience the most housing pressure because the community has both the highest fertility rate and the highest poverty rate. This has resulted in the Haredim moving out of their enclave communities in greater numbers in recent years, including to settlements in the West Bank; while some are simply creating new enclaves elsewhere, others are living within other types of religious Jewish communities, though continuing to use Haredi community institutions. Many interlocutors who live in such circumstances chose such environments purposefully, eschewing the panopticon of the community. Gradually, rabbinical leadership has recognised the need for relaxation of the parochialisms of Haredi life and a plurality of approaches have begun to emerge. Women are central to these changes; they use their agency to knit together these new strands of influence which are encountered in the non-Haredi world to create new patterns in the fabric of Haredi society.

These elements are all a part of the process of the creation of a new Haredi Middle Class. This characterises about a quarter to a third of families in the Haredi sector today, in which one or both parents work white-collar jobs, have gone to university, and earn more. Though seemingly more secularised, these families are not ostracised by the Haredi mainstream; indeed, they are a fundamental part of the economic and political survival of the community. Uniquely, women, more often than men, are the family members who transform their class

identity and drive growth in this Middle Class.

Chapter Five examines how Haredi women's agency and critique operates with a wealth of ethnographic examples. This chapter again uses much of the theory proposed by Mahmood in *Politics of Piety*. Like the agency of other groups of non-liberal religious women, Haredi women's agency is often grounded in their piousness; however, they use this agency in new and unlikely ways, integrating certain types of secular knowledge and values in order to imagine new types of Haredi womanhood. Throughout this thesis, but especially in this chapter, I use knitting as a metaphor for Haredi women's agency and critique. I envision women's agency as mediators between the secular and the religious as knitting together seemingly oppositional values into a complex, never-ending scarf of Haredi society. Women use their agency to select ideas from secular society which they feel would add value to the Haredi world, like choosing a particular soft or colourful yarn, and looping it through the scarf in concert with the yarn of religion. To me, their critique is like a picking apart, or a moment when they must unravel a few rows to reveal the stitch they dropped, and then re-pearl to repair the scarf. They critique the stringencies in modesty standards for damaging women's mental and physical health, unravelling the existing stitches of the Haredi scarf and repairing it with bits of secular yarns of many colours. I consider the proliferation of therapeutic approaches, and the acceptance of such, as an element of internal critique as well as an adoption of secular knowledge in the form of psychology. Ultimately, women use their agency to reform the fabric of Haredi society into one which accepts new forms of Haredi ethical womanhood, which unite religious values with secular knowledge. They emphasise Jewish unity over Haredi authority, and prioritise women's health and happiness in a constantly changing scarf of many colours.

Chapter Six examines the Haredi Feminist Movement. The willingness of women to accept the label of feminist has changed significantly in the last five years, and women

navigate the idea of being feminists living in a patriarchal religious society with savvy, and through distinction between the extent of religious authority on secular ideas. This is a new distinction which is a sign of the changes to and limits on *Da'as Torah*; it is also a result of improved religious and secular education. This is an extension of the agency which has been discussed throughout this thesis; the introduction of the secular yarn of feminism into the fabric of the Haredi scarf is simply another step in the knitting process; however, it is a particularly knotty yarn, full of liberal secular values, which forces bumps and gaps into the fabric. The majority of leaders in the Haredi Feminist Movement are Sephardi; they articulate discrimination against Sephardim as impetus for their outspokenness for women's rights. Furthermore, there is a divide in the feminist camp which is representative of the larger Haredi social divide: whether to cooperate with groups outside the Haredi sphere and distinguish between the realms of secular and religious authority, or to apply Haredi values to Israeli society as a whole, and refuse to cooperate with those outside the Haredi community. Feminist ideology is adopted where it does not conflict with religious law, and applied to secular aspects of Haredi community life, like equal pay and the ability of women to run for office. This differs from Religious Zionist feminist movements, which seek to change religious practice.

Chapter Seven returns to questions of secularism, liberalism, and nationalism first raised in the second chapter. Women are using their unique form of agency to pick apart the political from the religious in Haredi identity. This is occurring as a result of the influences of the threads introduced in previous chapters. I suggest that this is not a destruction of Haredi identity; it is a complex negotiation of both the religious and secular within Haredi identity, because the two are neither mutually exclusive, nor fixed categories, as our ever evolving scarf has revealed. I explore the ways in which this process is shifting people to the Left and the Right; the Right is intrinsically wound up in the Haredi move to West Bank settlements.

While I recognise these two shifts are products of the same process, I nonetheless submit a plea that this choice of Left versus Right matters on a practical, human level, and has implications for the future of the state of Israel.

Chapter Two: Formations of Haredi Identity

Secularism and the state transformed the religious identity of early Haredim into a political one, which entrenched religious stringencies in the community as time passed. This chapter will argue that secularism is essentially a repackaging of European Christian values in non-religious philosophy. Because secularism rejects the place of religion public life and modern personhood, it forces a (perhaps false) binary opposition in which the secular and the religious are at odds. Secularism necessitates the formation of nationalism as a replacement for identities that used to be fulfilled by religion. The Jews in Europe were influenced by both secularisation and nationalism; the latter became more important as various minority rights' movements failed to protect the Jews. Religious Jewish leaders sought to resist secular and nationalistic influences, which they saw as destroying Jewish life in the case of the former, and contaminating religious purity in the case of the latter. However, to resist these political secular movements, they had to participate in the secular political system so as to establish some form of power. Thus, the religious leaders were form a political movement in answer. Once this happened, religious leaders were faced with the question of how to avoid becoming that which they feared, while maintaining a stakehold in the political arena. In order to make secular participation more religious, rabbis became political leaders, and religious authority was extended over previously non-religious domains. This transformed identity into one in which the political was inseparable from the religious. The external secular-religious binary transformed internal Haredi identity into an internal enmeshment of the political and the

religious.

The entrenchment of the political within the religious became further emphasised within the state of Israel in the twentieth century. The secular-religious binary became emphasised in the Jewish state, which constantly questioned its own identity as either religious or secular. Not only were the Haredim establishing their identity in opposition to other Jews, but because the government and political system which was being resisted was a Jewish one that demanded citizens conform to a certain type of Judaism— and the Haredim do not fit this requirement. Resistance therefore serves to strengthen Haredi identity and commitment to religion. This has resulted in the increasingly stringent interpretation of religious law and tradition in the Haredi world; for men, this articulated itself in an emphasis on *yeshiva* study, which is especially important in establishing Haredi identity in opposition to the otherwise universal requirement that citizens serve in the army. Thus, Haredi identity is an entwined political-religious identity, which is in constant negotiation with secularism and the state.

This chapter serves to establish the discourse of Haredi identity (Pratt 2003, 10), based on my constructivist approach to identity in the thesis (Ben-eliezer 2004). This 'treats identity as a narrative … organized along two axes. …[A]n axis with a horizontal line running through past, present and future. …The other axis is vertical: it establishes who "we" are through opposition and the creation of an "other"' (Pratt 2003, 10). The outcome of this narrative reveals that Haredi identity is no less 'modern' (Taylor 1992) than the forces which it seeks to resist. Haredi identity develops along Taylor's three major facets of modern identity: the inward, inner self; the affirmation of self in every-day life; and the notion that our morals are part of our interior selves (Ibid., 9). Ultimately, this chapter establishes the dichotomy which Haredi women are faced with throughout the rest of this thesis. It establishes the fabric of Haredi identity, the scarf of Haredi society, with which the women work through knittings and unpickings in the rest of the chapters to come.

Jewish Life in Europe

Jewish life in Eastern Europe was unmarked by sectarianism throughout the first few centuries of the early modern era (Bacon 1996, 9). How, then, did religious difference among Jews emerge? The first major disruption occurred with the founding of Hasidism in the mid-18th century, by Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer, more commonly known by the title the *Ba'al Shem Tov* (lit. 'master of the good name'), abbreviated to the acronym *Besht*. He developed a mystical pantheistic version of Judaism based on a religious ethos of love, spirituality, joy, religious emotion, and ethics (Biale et al. 2018).[1] After his death in 1760, Hasidism developed a tradition of small groups of students who followed, and learned from, great rabbinical leaders. Each rebbe became founding leaders of specific Hasidic sects, named after the places in which the teachers were located (i.e. Liady, Kalisk, etc). Further dynasties have been founded since, based on the same model. The teachings of the *Besht* spread rapidly due to the populist turn of his dictate that even the 'lowliest farmer holding his *siddur* [prayer book] upside down could maintain a personal relationship to God,' as I was told at a Hasidic dinner table. Hasidism also faced enemies among the *yeshiva* traditionalists, and this became the central conflict within Ashkenazi Judaism from the late 18th century through the first part of the 19th century. The *yeshiva* traditionalists became known as the *misnagdim*, literally 'opponents', a title which to some extent endures today. The more prevalent word is Litvish, Yiddish for 'Lithuanian', due to the location of the most concentrated population of *misnagdim*. By the mid-19th century the Hasidic movement was more prevalent throughout areas which were controlled variously by the Polish and Russian Empires, as well as areas which today are in Austria and Hungary. The reasons for the ideological conflict between the

[1] Hasidism can be understood as the first modern movement within Judaism. See Biale et al. 2018.

Hasids and the *misnagdim* stem from differences in *hashkafa* [commonly translated to 'outlook,' but more complex, encompassing 'approach' and 'theology' as well].

However, another movement was growing in Europe during this time. As Enlightenment thought and the Age of Reason swept through the Christian centres of learning from London to Moscow, Jews were not unaffected. Its proponents championed rationalism and reform over the traditionalism of the Litvish tradition and the mysticism of Hasidism. The *Haskallah*, the Jewish Enlightenment, would eventually lead to the birth of the Reform Movement, and the first stirrings of secularism in Judaism (Efron 2003, 20). Jews were, therefore, the first non-Christian group to encounter the question of secular and religious conflict, and grapple with the philosophy of secular modernity. Haredi identity formed as a response to secularism, and later, Zionism. I would like to pause, however, and consider what is meant by the idea that a religious identity and category 'formed' in 'response' to 'secularism.' These terms carry significant meanings and complexities, and require interrogation. What follows can therefore be understood, to borrow Mahmood's term from 'genealogies of the secular' (2016), as a genealogy of formations of Haredi identity. I do not presume to call it a history, or even historiography; I select too specifically the events which seem most relevant to the formation of Haredi ethics. Rather, it is an exploration of the elements which transpired to create the specific community as it functions in Israel today.

Responding to the Threat of Secularisation

Talal Asad, in his seminal work *Formations of the Secular* (2003), suggests that we live with a myth of the secular state today (Ibid., 23), based on the ideology which secularism itself generates. We believe that secularism is the domain of all things rational and reasonable, and that secularism secures for us the domains of liberty, democracy, and equality. In certain ways, these beliefs are not incorrect; 'the secular' was birthed out of the

Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. However, these terms—secular, secularism—are as entwined with a European, and therefore Christian, past, as are the other ideas that they construe. First used in the mid-19th century, 'secular' and 'secularist' became replacements for the terms 'infidel' and 'atheist' (Ibid.), as the latter felt too entangled with the history of religious irrationality (Ibid., 24). 'Secular' ideas represent a (possibly artificial) rejection of religious association, and yet the Enlightenment philosophy in which it is so entwined is inalterably wrapped up with the ethics and values of Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity.

The Age of Reason was an outgrowth of the Protestant Reformation. Removing the church from religion was only one step ahead of removing God; as the Bible became a piece of literature, independent of belief, its values were repackaged into acceptable standards for the reasonable, secular European civilisation (Ibid., 8-9). Secularism became an ongoing practice in the 'cultivation of enlightenment' (Ibid., 60), which furthered the cause of Europe as civilisation (Ibid., 165). Such processes have been called by some 'Judeo-Christian' (Ibid., 8-9), but such characterisation ignores the long history of antisemitism rife within this process (Mahmood 2016, 8).[2] Wintle's claim, as described in Asad, that 'Europeanness' is tied inseparably from European history, specifically Rome, Christianity, Enlightenment, and Industrialisation (Asad 2003, 166), obviously leaves Jews out of the European equation. Furthermore, the conception of 'race' as a marker of human difference first emerged in the early days of Enlightenment (Goodman 2020, 10), and Jews were not considered 'white' (Ibid., 48). Furthermore, it establishes a state in which Europeanness begets Europeanness (Ibid., 168). The prejudice which is faced today by the Muslim is the same as that felt by the Jew for millennia: 'Prejudice against European Muslims today (and European and non-

[2] For more information on the history of 'Judeo-Christian' and its legacy as Islamophobic and Orientalist within European intellectual history, please see Nathan et al. 2016.

European Jews of the past) is constitutive of, and emanates from, this self-understanding of Europe as essentially Christian and simultaneously secular in its cultural and political ethos' (Mahmood 2016, 8). This myth of Europeanness is, and was, strengthened by ongoing violence toward those perceived to be non-European (Asad 2003, 162).

As Bosnian Muslims are today, Jews were viewed as 'in' Europe, but not 'of Europe' (Ibid., 164). Secularism provided a path for the Jews to gain membership in the European club; '… as members of the abstract category "humans," [they] can be assimilated or (as some recent theorists have put it) "translated" into a global ("European") civilization once they have divested themselves of what many of them regard (mistakenly) as essential to themselves' (Ibid., 169). For the European majority, assimilation of the Jews was necessary and desirable (Ibid., 170); for many Jews, it was no less desirable or tantalising. 'Secularism has an inescapable character that … promises to demolish hierarchies in order to create a body politic in which all its members are equal before the law' (Mahmood 2016, 2). Integral to the process of Jewish secularisation was the yearning for true acceptance and inclusion in Europe of a group which had always faced exclusion, ostracisation, and precariousness. The secularisation of the *Haskallah* offered a path to acceptance outside of the previously ubiquitous religious categories. It provided a way to remain Jewish without remaining non-European. Secularisation held great promise for the persecuted Jews. But did it deliver?

One must remember that while secularism gave birth to the myth of modernity, it also produced fascism (Asad 2013, 18). The Jews were granted certain forms of 'conditional tolerance' in Europe as early as the 18th century, but they did not see any substantive equality in legal form until the late 19th century: 1871 in Germany, and 1879 in France (Mahmood 2016, 40-41). In exchange for formal recognition in the law, the Jews also had to surrender a great deal of their communal autonomy, including the right to independent law tribunals (*Beit Din*), collective taxation, and political bargaining power (Ibid., 41). '… Jewish political

integration into Europe was predicated upon the dissolution of various forms of Jewish self-government and their collective subjection to the centralised state and its national laws, which came to apply homogeneously to all its subjects. The dissolution of communal autonomy was also meant to weaken religious ties, re-aligning Jewish fealty to the nation-state that now laid claim to the life and resources of all those it governed.' (Ibid.) Furthermore, this state of affairs did not secure the Jews the freedom from persecution and acceptance to the European politic as they had hoped. The Dreyfus Affair alone stands as testament to this; however, the Jews still presented as the obvious problematic Other, and could not seem to escape this status. Even Karl Marx frames his mission to de-politicise religion as 'The Jewish Question' (Ibid., 12-13).

It is in these circumstances that the response to secularism arose within the Jewish religious leadership. Mahmood suggests: 'Jewish emancipation over the long nineteenth century was predicated upon the privatization and individualization of Jewish religious life. This often entailed both the dissolution of their autonomy over various aspects of communal life and [sic] their assimilation into the cultural norms of European nations rooted in Christian values.' (Ibid., 12). It is unsurprising, then, that certain religious Jewish leaders felt action against these processes was necessary. There were three early leaders in the opposition to secularisation within traditional rabbinical circles: Rabbi Yisrael Salanter in Lithuania, and the first Gurer Rebbe in Poland, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter (Bacon 1996, 24); and Moses Sofer in Pressburg, Hungary, who established the rulings of the Shulchan Arech as absolute over all other rabbinical interpretations (Efron 2003, 21-22). Salanter is more commonly known for his founding of the Mussar Movement, which focuses on the development of character over the emphasis on textual study or mystical communion with God, and was very much a critique of Hasidism. Of note within our current discussion are the projects which Salanter initiated due to his growing concern about the decline of Jewry (Bacon 1996, 24).

These included the first publication for the Jews of Eastern Europe, *Tevuna*. The Gurer Rebbe in Warsaw also employed print media, as did Yaakov Halevi Lifschitz, the secretary to Rabbi Spektor of Kovno, who ultimately founded *HaLevanon*, the first publication for 'traditional' Jews (Ibid., 25) in Europe. However, by the mid- to late-19th century, 'There seems to be a clear pattern of a widening circle of rabbinic and lay leaders who sensed the need for the traditional masses to organize in order to use their demographic weight to defend their interests. The process of politicization went in fits and starts, but made headway, and resulted finally in the organized political movements of interwar Poland' (Ibid., 23). Ultimately, these disparate movements would resolve into the international organisation of *Agudat Yisrael* which persists today both as a broad, transnational body and as a political party in Israel; but the internal conflicts and battles which characterised its halting and tortuously slow generation continue to be at work in Haredi and Orthodox communities today.

It should also come as no surprise that the result of these responses to secularism, the formation of Haredi identity was one of increasing emphasis on stringent religious practice. Because secularisation reproduces and disseminates itself, it produces religiously informed modes of 'law, ethics, subjects, and consciousness' (Brown 2013, ix-x). While this process is never-ending, the secular also simultaneously embeds religion in the social life of all its citizens, 'by relegating it to the private sphere and civil society' (Mahmood 2016, 21). By making the artificial opposition of religion versus the secular, this inadvertently places an emphasis on religion for the religious because of its perceived exclusion. This naturally makes religion more important, especially to those who may be a minority in the greater polity (Ibid., 15). The categories of 'religion' and 'secular' are constantly shifting (Mahmood 2013, 81-82), creating the project of modernity (Asad 2003, 13). This project claims certain kinds of knowledge as secular and modern (Ibid., 15-22), and these contribute to the binaries

of ‘religion’ and ‘reason’ which secularism seeks to create (Ibid., 15). It is the imposition of these ways of thinking upon those who lie outside of European norms which Taussig deems the ‘institutional interpretation of reason by violence’ (Taussig 1992, 116, as quoted in Asad 2003, 22). Ultimately, the goal of secularism is to annihilate religion, in a Nietzchean sense, but instead it succeeds in placing religion at the centre of family life and civil society.

The Spectre of Nationalism

If identity had before been established religiously, then the introduction of the secular age left a chasm around the question of collective identity in Europe. Previously, ‘nation’ had simply referred to people of a certain culture, but by the end of the 18th century nationalism became a force within Europe (Calhoun 1997, 9). Both secularism and Enlightenment philosophy contributed to the development of nationalist ideology: reason demanded that map-making display definite and distinct borders, while European states became increasingly powerful militarily, domestic administration became more of a focus, and colonialism was the mode of empire (Ibid., 13-15). Secularism demanded a way for people from different backgrounds to clarify and consolidate their identities (Ibid., 19).

Some, like Geertz, have theorised that nationalism became a replacement for religion (Asad 2003, 187-189); Asad suggests instead that if secularised identities ‘retain a religious essence [sic]’ (Ibid., 189), it is because these identities have a religious origin. His example, that the English Church is a necessary condition of Englishness (Ibid., 190), seems particularly apt. Ultimately, however, the formation of nationalism makes sense only within the context of secular thought (Ibid., 193), which is, as discussed above, a repackaging of the ethics and values of Protestantism. Therefore, while religion does not produce nationalism (Ibid., 194), it is a necessary component of it, especially in the European context. Religion is vital to the origins of, and continuing production of, nations and nationalism (Smith 2003,

15).

But if religion is a component in the national formation of states, it is not the doctrine of the secular nation state. Instead, '[a] secular, liberal state depends crucially for its public virtues (equality, tolerance, liberty) on political myth…' (Asad 2003, 56). Essentially, the ethics and values of secularism (equality, tolerance, and liberty) become the ethics of the secular nation. To be 'modern,' society is expected to have a certain level of moral homogeneity (Ibid., 186), under which ethics and values are defined by 'rights' (Ibid., 129-134). This discourse of 'rights' established itself through European Christian history, starting with the status of a Roman citizen, and evolving through the Middle Ages to Molina's and Locke's interpretations, which ultimately resolved into the ideas of 'natural' or 'inalienable' rights (Ibid., 130-134). In the twentieth century, these rights became 'human rights' (Ibid., 129), which Asad suggests imposes the secular discourse of 'being human' upon those from disparate ethical systems (Ibid., 124). This, Asad says, puts a certain amount of 'violence at the heart of a political doctrine which has disavowed violence on principle… the violence of universalizing reason itself' (Ibid., 59). By endowing all 'humans' with individual autonomy, religion can be classified as 'false consciousness' (Ibid., 124), and the imposition of secular values (under the guise of human rights) is able to 'redeem' the religious individual (Ibid.). It is in this way that the liberalising or democratising mission becomes a secular reiteration of the original colonial civilising mission (Asad 2013, 20-21).

The Jews of Europe were, ultimately, the first objects of this secular civilising mission; they were also the first test-case for Europe's assumed mastery of these secular ideals of tolerance and equality. As discussed above, legal and political protection of the Jews and their supposed rights were a very long time coming, and substantial antisemitic sentiment persisted despite these tardy gains (Mahmood 2016: 40-41). However, in the interwar years, following the end of World War I, Europeans enforced the consideration of minority rights in

the former Ottoman states, based on their non-secular (and Muslim) history (Ibid., 31-53), but did not deem it necessary to make European states, including Germany, subject to the same sanctions.[3] Germany, and other European states, as both European and secular, were considered free of the contamination of religion, which would precipitate ethnic conflict and genocide. How wrong they were.

Nationalist ideology did not elude the Jews; indeed, in the face of continuing persecution, the promise of national identity seemed like an apt solution for many. Despite their distress at the growing secularisation of Jews, even the most vocal rabbis hesitated to form an outright political organisation, or to directly oppose the leaders of the *Haskallah* or Zionist movements for fear of creating too great of a schism within the Jewish community, which still faced great persecution. Ultimately, the leadership of Theodor Herzl and the articulation of a politicisation of Zionism forced a politicisation of the religious opposition. Herzl's policy of '*kibbush ha-kehillot*', the conquest of the communities, posed a direct threat to the rabbinic tradition and their authority (Bacon 1996, 28). 'With the appearance of political Zionism under the leadership of Theodor Herzl, the perceived threat to traditional Judaism intensified, for here was a movement which used the symbols and vocabulary long held sacred by Jews (the Land of Israel, Redemption and the like), was led by avowedly secular Jews, and proclaimed itself neutral on matters of personal religious practice' (Ibid., 27). By the beginning of the 20th century there was a clear need within religious Judaism for the formation of some sort of organisation for international cooperation, not only to deal with the spectres of secularisation and Zionism, but also to respond to mass migration which was spreading the diaspora even farther than previously in history, and the lack of well-defined professional standards across rabbinical institutions (Ibid., 28-29). In 1903, the first

[3] This was largely due to the focus of the Christian European nations on the Armenian Genocide; see discussion in Mahmood 2016.

International Rabbinical Conference was convened in Krakòw by the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Cairo. From ideals discussed at this conference, the organisation *Kenesset Yisrael* was ultimately founded. Led by Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski of Vilna, it existed only from 1907-1908, when the Russian government created insurmountable obstacles. However, *Kenesset Yisrael* is important in its articulation that '[o]nly an organized orthodox public could properly defend the interests of the orthodox masses' (Ibid., 31), and it sought to unite all religious Jews under one banner, while committing to working with anyone who sought to widen Jewish rights, improve the economic situation of Jews, and found charitable and philanthropic organisations (Ibid., 30-32). Though short-lived, *Kenesset Yisrael* represents the first effective Jewish religious political organisation which transcended the divisions of Litvish and Hasidic, in unity against a Zionist foe.

It is also important to recognise that parallel to *Kenesset Yisrael* in Poland, Germany was host to the Frankfurt Orthodox Separatist Movement. Like *Kenesset Yisrael*, this movement sought to oppose the Zionists; however, it did not espouse the cooperative attitudes which characterised *Kenesset Yisrael* and continued to feature in future religious political organisations in Poland in the inter-war years (Ibid., 32). The Frankfurt Separatists were, in many ways, more radical in their approach, and also more privileged in their resources and political alliances. In 1909, the Frankfurt Separatists, under the leadership of Yitzchak Halevi, convened a meeting at Bad Hamburg which allowed for the introduction of the German Orthodox to the rabbinical leadership of Eastern Europe, either through their direct attendance or through blessings sent through emissaries. Connections created through the 1909 meeting were utilised when, following the walkout of the religious Zionists in 1911, a conference was planned for Katowice in 1912. Katowice, in Silesia, was the site of the original *Hibat Zion* conference in 1884, and sat on the geographic border between East and Central Europe, offering neutral ground for the politically savvy Frankfurt Separatists and the

religious elite of Eastern Europe. Most of the great rabbis of the Litvish communities attended, and most of the Hasidic Rebbes also either attended or sent emissaries. The Gurer Rebbe, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai Alter, did not attend but sent a letter to be read aloud; this 'warm message of support' was so well received that it was tossed into the conference audience, where the attendees scrambled for it; it was granted almost instantaneous relic status (Ibid., 36). From the 27th to the 29th of May 1912, the European religious leadership founded *Agudat Yisrael*, with plans for a *Kenessia Gedola*, a great parliament, to convene as a supreme international religious governing body in August 1914. Because of the outbreak of World War I, however, the *Kenessia Gedola* would not take place until 1923 (Ibid., 34-36).

While the international organisation waited for war, and then influenza, to cease, local branches of *Agudat Yisrael*, henceforth referred to as *Agudah*, were able to establish within portions of the religious Jewish world. Poland was occupied by the Germans for most of the war; under their control, Jewish communities enjoyed relative safety and freedom compared to previous Polish and Russian regimes (Ibid., 37-38). The German occupation preferred to use minorities to police their own, and two prominent leaders from the Frankfurt Separatists were brought to Warsaw to administrate for the Jews of Poland, Pinchas Kohn and Emanuel Carlebach. They arrived in 1916 with a clear list of goals as articulated by Jacob Rosenheim, the head of the Frankfurt Separatists:

1) to 'reach an understanding' with the Polish people, where the Jews would not be part of nationalist projects,
2) to politicise the Orthodox Jewish masses,
3) to rebuild communal life around the basis of Torah, and
4) to create an educational policy which found a balance between modern culture and religion (Ibid., 39).

In this manifesto, we can clearly see that there is an acceptance of a certain amount of

secularism. Already, the scarf of Haredi society has some secular yarn knitted into it. The educational policy is one of balance between religious knowledge and 'modern' secular forms of knowledge. This seeks to form a religious ethic, on the 'basis of Torah' which includes certain forms of secularity; this includes the politicisation of the strictly religious. In order to resist the dangerous secular movements, a certain amount of secularity in behaviour and approach is necessary and acceptable.

Kohn and Carlebach helped found the Polish *Agudah*, which became the most powerful local branch of *Agudat Yisrael* in the world prior to World War II. Kohn and Carlebach also attempted to propagate the Frankfurt's vision of total separation from non-religious Jewry, which completely failed in Poland. 'Polish orthodoxy turned to politics not to preserve a dwindling minority group as in Germany, but to provide a spokesman for a hitherto silent majority'(Ibid., 43).

The inter-war years in Europe were characterised by further power struggles between the Zionists and *Agudat Yisrael*, as well as the Bund, though the socialists were to a certain extent absorbed into both camps. The populations over whom these battles were fought were the Jewish workers (Ibid., 100-117) and the Jewish youth (Ibid., 118-141); the sites of the conflict were the community councils (Ibid., 178-224) and the educational system (Ibid., 142-177). The *Agudah* in Poland founded the *Tseirei Agudat Yisrael* in 1919, its youth wing, which offered religious education under adult leadership (Ibid., 119), unlike the more liberal approach of the Zionist *B'nai Akiva*. Like all aspects of the *Agudah*, *Tseirei* faced internal disputes, usually between the Gurer Rebbe and other leaders, as well as complete rejection by the Belzer Rebbe (Ibid., 120-122), but nonetheless enjoyed high levels of attendance throughout Poland until the second invasion of Germany. The *Agudah* enjoyed somewhat less success within the worker's orthodox organisation, *Poalei Agudat Yisrael*, possibly because work itself was at the heart of what was troubling about modernity (Ibid., 100). Ultimately

though, the importance of *Agudat Yisrael* is fundamental to understanding the Haredi identity because it represents the first and thus far lasting instance of religious Jewish groups overcoming *hashkafic* differences in order to unite against secularism; and it unified religion and politics in a single identity for the first time.

Da'as Torah and the Political Religious

Agudat Yisrael faced a significant challenge in resisting secularism, and that is in the response to the secular effort to limit and curtail religion and religious authority (Brown 2013, ix). Once established as both an organisation and a political party in Poland, *Agudat Yisrael* faced a dilemma: if politics are inherently secular, then how can the *Agudah* exist as a political entity representing religious opposition to the secularisation of the Jewish people without itself becoming secularised? What power do religious leaders have to 'combat the structural injury' in which secular terms have sought to define religious concepts (Butler 2013, 99)?

Historian Gershon Bacon contends that while the concept of *Da'as Torah* is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, the meaning has been significantly changed in its use in modern orthodoxy (1996, 51). Bacon claims its Talmudic use is to distinguish between the 'intent of the Torah' and the probable meaning of the text; he further refers to Maimonides's clarification in the *Guide for the Perplexed*, which states that *Da'as Torah* refers to the 'view of the Torah' as opposed to the 'view of the philosophers' or the 'view of the masses' on theological matters (Ibid., 51). Instead, Bacon suggests, at the turn of the 20th century *Da'as Torah* started to be used by rabbinical leadership to support an 'extreme notion of rabbinic authority' (Ibid., 48).

Much of the supposed re-interpretation of *Da'as Torah* stems from the teachings of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, the Chafetz Chaim, whose authority was institutionalised by Sofer in

Hungary. The Chafetz Chaim taught that rabbis, through the wisdom of Torah, were able to solve all the problems of the world (Ibid., 52).

> '[O]nly the rabbis, whose opinions were based solely on Jewish tradition, could formulate solutions to the problems of the Jewish people in the modern era; only a Jewish community conducted according to the Torah by men who were the embodiment of Torah could hope to survive in the long run. … It gave religious sanction to the views of political orthodoxy by an appeal to the moral authority of *gedolei haTorah* [italicisation in original; meaning the great Torah scholars]'(Ibid., 53).

Not only does the concept of *Da'as Torah* make the political religious, it also makes the political infallible and indisputable.

In contrast, Avi Shafran, the director of public affairs for Agudath Israel of America offers the following explanation of *Da'as Torah*:

> 'What [*Da'as Torah*] means, simply put, is that those most imbued with Torah-knowledge and who have internalized a large degree of the perfection of values and refinement of character that the Torah idealizes are thereby rendered particularly, indeed extraordinarily, qualified to offer an authentic Jewish perspective on matters of import to Jews - just as expert doctors are those most qualified (though still fallible, to be sure) to offer medical advice.' (Shafran 2008)

Coincidentally, there is a warning in a banner on the top of the website for Agudath Israel of America when visited at time of writing. It looks like a cookie warning at first, but upon closer examination, it reads, 'According to *Daas Torah*, internet usage is only permitted with proper and adequate filtration' ('About Agudath Yisrael' 2019).

The vast majority of my research participants would take great issue with Bacon's argument; I am sure they would say that he misinterprets both the Talmud and Maimonides, and demand to know how rabbinic authority could possibly be separated from the interpretation of the intent of the Torah. I am not a religious studies scholar; I do not seek to make a sweeping statement about whether or not *Da'as Torah* is a manufactured concept. I am an anthropologist, and what concerns me is the question of what *Da'as Torah* means for the structure and function of Haredi society today. For this research, *Da'as Torah* is important for the following reasons:

1) It established rabbis as both religious and political leaders;

2) It greatly reinforced the patriarchal and hierarchical aspects of traditional Judaism; and

3) It created an atmosphere of absolutism within the populace; while the rabbis can disagree and debate among themselves (which indeed they do), those who lack *smicha* (rabbinical ordination) cannot question, debate, or lead.

It is not unusual for this type of response to emerge in non-Christian religious communities which are newly introduced to secularism. Rinaldo discussed a similar process in her study of veiling practices in Indonesia: she suggested the process of 'democratization' of Indonesia led to 'a broad turn toward more conservative understandings of Islam' (Rinaldo 2014, 825). Ultimately, this religious response to secularisation can be understood as both resistance to (Asad 2003) and critique of (Asad 2013b, 134) the secular.

Bacon also suggests that a hallmark of *Da'as Torah* is the ability to make sweeping rulings and mandates without *halachic* foundation (1996, 55). Whether or not this is the case, the differentiation between rabbinical rulings which are founded in *halacha* [Jewish religious law] and those which are not is the focus of many of the women's movements which are discussed later in this project. *Da'as Torah* was mentioned on occasion in my interviews, and it maintains a ubiquitous presence in the background of Haredi life. Ruth Colian, whose voice can be found throughout the following chapters, cites *Da'as Torah* in describing her decision to seek a rabbinical ruling in support of her decision to pursue access to a better religious school for her daughter. There is also activism towards limiting the scope of *Da'as Torah* and it will be explored in Chapter Six. *Da'as Torah* is approached and implemented in different ways, depending on the group (Baumel 2006, 46). Ultimately, *Da'as Torah* is of integral importance to the question of Haredi identity, and yet is grossly under researched and neglected in other scholarly studies.

Da'as Torah represents the establishment of Haredi identity as both a religious and

political one; it places everything firmly in the religious realm by granting authority to religious leaders over all aspects of life. In this way, life is reclaimed from the secular domain and secularism is resisted. This is only necessitated by the binary opposition manufactured by secularism, because the two cannot remain separate in the body that struggles to conform to the impossible binary. Also, by granting rabbinical leadership such authority by virtue of their religious wisdom, it allows them to take on the role of politicians. Thus, the 'structural violence' of secularism can be combatted on religious terms. If the religious is then political, however, and the secular is within the purview of religious authority, it stands to reason that the political then becomes religious; to *vote* Haredi is to conform to Haredi ethics. *Da'as Torah* establishes the premise for this; the significance of this will become apparent as we explore the formation of Haredi identity within the state of Israel.

Ottoman Rule, British Mandate, and the Development of Extremism

There is evidence of religious Jews living in the Holy Land continuously since the fall of the second temple; in addition, Ashkenazi Jews have been moving to the Holy Land in great numbers since the 16th century. Under the Ottomans, Jews enjoyed a relatively high quality of life (Mahmood 2016, 34-35), and some Jews chose to make their home in the Ottoman Empire after expulsions and persecutions in Europe. One of the reasons for this, Mahmood claims, is the fact that the Ottomans did not seek to transform 'difference into sameness' (Ibid., 35); there was no assimilation and no forced conversion (Ibid., 36). Jews in the Ottoman Empire were not restricted as to movement or choice of occupation, nor were they exiled or killed for their faith (Ibid., 36). Safed had become a centre of Kabbalistic study, and by the mid-16th century there were over 10,000 Jews residing in Palestine, with the majority concentrated in Jerusalem and Safed (Efron 2003, 17). These religious Jews emulated life in the European lands that they left, and founded *yeshivot* which their sons would attend to

study religious texts (Ibid., 18). These communities were spared much of the internal conflict that plagued Eastern European Jewish communities, including splits between Hasidism and *misnagdim*, and the subsequent *Haskallah*. It was a shock to them, therefore, when the First Aliyah occurred in 1881 and they encountered Zionism for the first time.

> 'Relations between these new settlements and existing Jewish settlements were tense from the start. Though many of the new settlers were religiously observant— some more, some less— they didn't admire the Jews they found in Palestine. … [t]hey made light of the primitive ways of the Jews who— to their eyes— were now far more Levantine than European.
> 'The antipathy was mutual. Jews already living in Palestine found little to esteem in the new settlers, who knew nothing and were too arrogant to learn. …[T]he religious observance of the neophytes was always suspect (it was, indeed, often lax by traditionalist standards). …This friction between Zionists and traditionalists would never go away; it has only gotten steadily worse in the hundred and twenty years since the first Zionists arrived.' (Ibid., 27-28)

Unfortunately, the relative peace which the Jews enjoyed in the Holy Land under Ottoman rule was gradually eroded toward the end of their reign, mainly due to European interference (Mahmood 2016, 39). Religious Jews began to struggle with the same conflicts as those their European compatriots had encountered. This was further amplified under the British Mandate, because of the colonial practice of 'mapping religious identity onto other social distinctions (regional, economic, tribal)' (Ibid., 63). Once *Agudat Yisrael* was founded in 1912, the religious population of Israel was an obvious candidate for a local area *Agudah*. Moshe Blau, a young rabbi, became leader of the first *Agudah* in Mandate Palestine in 1919; he 'had concluded that the only way to protect "Torah Judaism," as he called it, was to separate it entirely, in its politics and culture, from the Zionists' community in Palestine' (Efron 2003, 33). In this, Blau had much in common with the Frankfurt Separatists. He established schools, courts, civil authorities, and other elements of the *Agudat Yisrael* structure as it existed in Eastern Europe, and continued to negotiate for peace with the Arab leaders in Palestine, counter to the Zionist cause (Ibid., 33-34). He led *Agudat Yisrael* in Mandate Palestine, until his death on a ship en route to America in 1946 ('Thousands Attend

Funeral' 1946). The development of *Agudat Yisrael* in the Holy Land, then, followed a more extreme path than the moderate compromisers in Poland; religious Jews in Mandate Palestine were far more partial to the Frankfurt approach of a complete break with other Jewish communities and organisations like the hardline but powerful Frankfurt minority. This would set the tone for religious community choices in Israel after the founding of the state, though even this early separatist attitude found compromise as the ethnic conflicts increased within Palestine in the 1930s (Efron 2003, 36). Already, some thought that the approach of *Agudat Yisrael* did not go far enough, however, and further extremism emerged in Jerusalem before long.

The beginnings of a more extreme approach than that offered by the Palestine *Agudah* can be traced to a 1920 board member Jacob Israel de Haan (Ibid., 33). De Haan had been a socialist in Holland, and had married a Christian woman who, even after de Haan's repentance, refused to convert to Judaism; he refused to divorce her despite this. De Haan became an ardent zealot in the Holy Land, with special hatred of all things secular, but Zionism most of all (Ibid., 33-34). So extreme was his rejection of the Zionist project that he refused to speak to other Jews in the nascent Modern Hebrew which was rapidly spreading in Mandate Palestine, and instead only communicated in Arabic (Ibid., 34). When de Haan was murdered by a sniper from the Zionist organisation *Haganah*, a paramilitary group that became the prototype for the Israel Defence Force (IDF) in 1924, many of the *Agudah* Jews felt confirmed in their belief that the Zionists were 'evil men and ruffians', as Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld declared (Ibid., 34-35).

With de Haan as a martyr around which it was possible to rally, Rabbi Sonnenfeld drew many more Jews to his organisation, *Eidah haChareidi* ('Congregation of Haredi', here after called '*Eidah Haredi*' or '*Eidah*') which had been founded in 1921 with the help of other more conservative rabbis. *Eidah Haredi* ran its own *Beit Din*, a rabbinical court, and was

created as an alternative to the Chief Rabbinate of Mandate Palestine, as created by the British with Zionist rabbinical leaders; the *Agudah* was somewhat supportive of *Eidah* early in its life but later separated itself from the newer organisation. It should be noted, this seems to be the first official use of 'Haredi' as a term in opposition to Zionism in the Holy Land; up until this point, the word Haredi seems to have been interchangeable with 'orthodox', which, from this point on, also seems to apply to religious Jews with Zionist leanings (Samet 1988: 249). *Eidah Haredi* continues to exist today; their own website claims that they were founded because the Zionists created animosity with the Arabs, and that *Eidah Haredi* was welcomed by the Arabs in Palestine:

> 'When the winds of Zionism began to blow through Palestine, the Arabs began to change their attitude because of the fact that they heard that the "Jews" wanted to grab the Land from them and expel them. Of course, they did not distinguish between the Zionist troublemakers and the members of the loyal authentic Jewish community that advocated tolerance and peace. There were outbreaks of violence here and there, until bloodshed began and many people died.
> 'However, instead of learning from this experience that brought suffering upon the Jewish People in the Holy Land, and ceasing their dangerous lawless behavior, the Zionists used these events as "additional proof" for the need for a state and an army to protect the Jews from violence. Jewish blood was of no importance to the Zionists in comparison to their "lofty" nationalist goals.
> 'It was clear to the leaders of the Orthodox community that there was an immediate need for an organization to confront the Zionist organization, and demand that the British desist from endorsing the idea of a Zionist state, and resolve Arab-Jewish tensions peacefully….
> 'It goes without saying that the Eida Haredis [sic] was accepted warmly among non-Jews, much more so than was the case with the Zionists – both because of the fact that the Eida Haredis represented traditional, authentic Judaism against Zionism that openly rejected Judaism in its entirety, and because of the fact that the Orthodox position made more sense in order to prevent bloodshed and promote harmony in Palestine.' ('The Murder of Dr. DeHaan' 1924)

The *Eidah Haredi* website, which is under the English title 'Torah Jews', perpetuates the self-definition that *Eidah* seems to have always espoused as peacemakers and saviours of the Jewish nation. The leadership of *Eidah Haredi* following the death of Rabbi Sonnenfeld in 1932 exemplifies the extremist bent of the organisation: the most recent leadership has included both Yoel and Moshe Teitelbaum, Rebbes of the Satmar; they moved the

headquarters of *Eidah Haredi* to New York as the ultimate protest to Zionism, despite the English name of the organisation, Orthodox Council of Jerusalem, enduring. *Eidah Haredi* is not especially significant to the research within this work, besides further clarifying the formation of the identity and category of Haredi, and providing the groundwork upon which a different organisation was founded, one which continues to endure in the spaces of Israel where my work occurred: *Neturei Karta*.

While the above quote from *Eidah Haredi* website may be conflated with other ideological goals, it does seem that conflict between Arabs and Jews increased in Mandate Palestine in the 1930s (Efron 2003, 35-36). Meanwhile, there had also been a new influx of religious Jews escaping persecution in Europe; these people felt significantly less animosity toward the Zionists, likely due to the horrors of Nazi persecution from which they had escaped (Ibid., 35). By the mid-1930s, the *Agudah* had found common ground with the Zionists in an effort to protect Jewish communities from the rising levels of violence with Arabs (Ibid., 35). In 1934, *Agudah* member Rabbi Isaac Breuer made an impassioned speech to the community, beseeching members to participate in rebuilding the Holy Land, and not 'leave Jewish history to the Zionists' (Ibid., 36). This proved to be the breaking point for certain members, as it represented too sharp of an ideological break from what they thought were Torah values: that it was counter to the way of God to try and 'hurry the Messiah' (Ibid., 36) by rebuilding the Holy Land before it was the ordained time to do so.

In 1935, a group of leaders who had particularly followed the teachings of Rabbi Sonnenfeld, split from the *Agudah*. Originally called *Chevrat haChaim* ('Community of Life'), they soon changed their name to Aramaic, which endures today: *Neturei Karta*, which literally means 'Guardians of the City'. Their first leader, Rabbi Amram Blau, was the brother of Rabbi Moshe Blau, first leader of the Palestine *Agudah*; Amram (which is how I will refer to him forthwith, to avoid confusion) led *Neturei Karta* until his death in 1974.

Amram encouraged zealotry as the only saving grace of Judaism, as it saved the Jews at Masada (Ibid., 36-37); he and his followers perpetually attacked the *Agudah* politically throughout the remaining period of Mandate Palestine. Following the creation of the state of Israel, they denounced David Ben-Gurion, rejected the state and denied its legitimacy under international law, and negotiated with Jordanian diplomats to live under their rule, even issuing their own *Neturei Karta* monetary notes (Ibid., 37). In the 1950s, Amram organised the Sabbath Riots, inciting his teenage followers to act out violently against those non-observant Jews who passed by the *Neturei Karta* area in Mea She'arim, Jerusalem. Leaders of *Neturei Karta* since Amram have continued to advocate the use of violence and sought to undermine the state through shows of support for Hamas and Fatah, the Palestinian parties in Gaza and the West Bank.

My research did not include any women who identified as members of *Neturei Karta*, but there were several women with whom I conducted research who would identify more significantly with the extreme fringe groups like *Neturei Karta*. Since the founding of *Neturei Karta*, new groups who participate in similar levels of aggressive anti-Zionism and reject all participation in the state have multiplied. Furthermore, certain established groups whose elements were more significantly aligned with *Neturei Karta* have had sub-sects split from the more mainstream Haredi part of the community and follow the extreme teachings of Amram and those like him. For the most part, these groups live in Mea She'arim. While the majority of my work does not concern women who live in the extreme anti-Zionist fringe, one woman, Grune, whom we will meet in Chapter Seven, grew up in Mea She'arim among an extreme branch of the Breslever Hasidic sect. Research among these women has taken on a certain level of fashionability today likely because of their extreme attitudes (Dalsheim 2019, 84), but my research was mainly more concerned with women who were more typical of mainstream, establishment Haredi life.

However, violence against secular Jews has spread significantly to other populations within Haredi communities, and Noah Efron, an historian at Bar Ilan University, credits *Neturei Karta* with creating a sort of heroic militarism within the Haredi identity: 'These books are testaments to a new sort of ultra-Orthodox heroism, one that is activist, one that is combative, one that owes everything to Amram Blau and his *Neturei Karta* [my italicisation]' (2003, 41). Stadler, an anthropologist at Hebrew University, found that this identity had become integral to the Haredi male identity broadly by the time of her fieldwork in the early aughts. She suggests that there is a militaristic imaginary of the *yeshiva* student as soldier, fighting against his *yetzer hara*, his evil inclination, which she characterises as his sexual desires (Stadler 2009, 54), but which I have discussed elsewhere as a broader sense of temptation and weakness. Furthermore, modest standards of dress which were first viewed as extreme within these types of communities have nonetheless influenced others. For instance, even for the most mainstream establishment Haredi groups, it is still common to choose not to speak Modern Hebrew, and instead speak Yiddish, as a recognition of the role of Hebrew in the Zionist project (Lefkowitz 2006, 16). Therefore, it is important to recognise the influence of one extremist group upon others, and contextualise the continued presence of *Neturei Karta* and others like them in Haredi neighbourhoods in Israel as a continuing influence on Haredi identity to this day.

Despite the internal splits within the nascent Haredi community which gave birth to *Eidah Chareidi* and *Neturei Karta*, the majority of Jews who identified as religious and not Zionist in Mandate Palestine remained more strongly affiliated with the more moderate approach of *Agudat Yisrael*. While there were occasional radical departures— for instance, the *Agudah* translated into Hebrew and disseminated Wasserman's pamphlet suggesting the Zionists were to blame for the Nazis (Efron 2003, 45)— the *Agudah* continued to work in partnership with the Zionists in Mandate Palestine and through the formation of the state.

Ultimately, *Agudat Yisrael* was far more receptive to the creation of the state of Israel than previous ideology would have suggested. In the minutes of the notes of the *Agudat Yisrael* meeting in Israel on the day of the United Nations vote to establish a Jewish State called the phenomenon 'divine provenance' (Ibid., 46). *Agudat Yisrael*, now a formal political party in the state of Israel, which joined forces with the *Dati Leumi* as the United Religious Front, gaining 12 seats in the first *Knesset* (Israeli Parliament); a Haredi rabbi, Yitzhak Meir Levine, was chosen to serve as Minister of Welfare.

Israel: Secular Jewish State?

It is my premise, generally, that the Haredi community operates as a minority within the nation-state of Israel. They have formed this approach over a long history of interactions with the state apparatus, and this approach, as a minority, has in turn affected the formation of Haredi identity. Mahmood suggests that a 'minority' is not a demographic category, but rather a 'shared sense of collective discrimination, political in that it signifies hierarchal difference' (Mahmood 2016, 54). Ironically, the origins of contemporary contestations of minority groups are largely influenced by the history of the Jews in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The United Nations legal apparatus surrounding minorities and human rights emerged from both the Holocaust, and the language of the failed Polish Minority Treaty, which American Jewish groups attempted to employ for the protection of Jews in Poland before the Second World War, but which was never successfully implemented as it was viewed as a threat to Polish sovereignty (Ibid., 56). This treaty proposed language around proportional representation of minorities (in this case, Jews), at all levels of government, and sought communal control over social, educational, and religious institutions (Ibid.). The fact that this protection treaty was unable to be implemented served to fuel the Zionist anxieties within Europe, which divided over the essence of what was

necessary: security within Europe, or self-determination (Ibid., 56-57). Ultimately, the events of the Holocaust decided this for both the Zionists and the world. Hannah Arendt suggests that the Holocaust proved that human rights were meaningless without membership in a nation (Mahmood 2016, 57; Dalsheim 2019, 89). The only true protection was available through independent sovereignty (Mahmood 2016, 58), and thus the state of Israel was born.

Early Zionism, as we learned previously, rejected almost all forms of religion (Dalsheim 2019, 83). Zionists sought to make Zionism a 'modern' movement, with a Westernised Jewish polity (Shohat 2017). It was 'a project that sought freedom from religious persecution, and freedom from religion itself' (Dalsheim 2019, 165). Thus, in the early state of Israel, there was a struggle born of this vision, in which the question of democracy seemed at odds with a population that sought to maintain religious tradition in their new home.

A prominent feature of the modern secular state is the willingness to cause pain if doing so is in the service of democracy and results in the humanisation of the subjects (Asad 2003, 62). In this, the early state of Israel was no different than other secularised societies, and Israel continues to be representative of this globally shared feature of secular states (Mahmood 2016, 10). The ultimate result is that these forms of secular governance ultimately lead to an exacerbation of the tensions which predated the formation of the secular state (Ibid., 1). This is because a secular democracy is predicated upon two fundamental myths: that of elite liberal clarity which seeks to contain and curtail religion and religious life; and the inevitable democratic majority which dominates minority groups (Asad 2003, 61). Mahmood suggests, 'Following Talal Asad, I conceptualize political secularism as the modern state's sovereign power to reorganize substantive features of religious life, stipulating what religion is or ought to be, assigning its proper content, and disseminating concomitant subjectivities, ethical frameworks, and quotidian practices' (Mahmood 2016, 3). Essentially, the secular state expects a certain type of citizen, with certain types of ethics and values, who

will conform to specific behaviours and obligations. This leads to certain strategies in which the secular state manages difference (Ibid., 60). For the minority, this results in new ways of understanding identity within the polity, and how it operates in defense of its own ethics and values in the face of a possibly hostile majority (Ibid.). Israel has, in its pursuit of secular democracy, developed this relationship with its Haredi minority.[4] In this way (among others), Israel is no different from its post-colonial neighbours in the Middle East in contending with 'a new grid of intelligibility and a form of stratification' that fails to eliminate religious difference (Ibid., 62). In some ways, this process was further exacerbated in the state of Israel, which followed the ideology of *mamlachtiyut*, or 'stateism', which centres all power, knowledge, and authority in the state apparatus (Ben-eliezer 2004, 247).

In the face of the majoritarian prejudice which is implicit in all democratic secular states, minorities find themselves in an advocacy process which only serves to highlight their differences (Mahmood 2016, 67). In Israel, as in Mahmood's case study of Egypt, this is only further complicated when the state takes a role in regulating religion (Ibid., 80). In Egypt, portions of religious life remain in state control; in Israel, the state regulates religious life through the rabbinate, the kosher food certification system, the religious family courts, oversight of the ritual baths, and many other ways. These roles are not seen as a violation of secularism; indeed, they maintain a system in which the myth of secularism becomes self-perpetuating, because this incursion of the state is constantly subject to the demand that religion be kept separate (Ibid., 2). This is only possible because of the type of ethics, values, and personhood which is expected by the state of its citizens.

Dalsheim states: 'In Israel, the sovereign people are not "Israelis," they are "Jews." This conflation of nation and religion in the definition of the people reproduces a racial

[4] Haredim are clearly not the only minority at odds in the secular polity of Israel; the most obvious is the Palestinian minority, who is at significantly less advantage in manoeuvring for their own interests. Shohat (2017) and Lavie (2018) would also position non-Ashkenazim in a similar minority role, and there are countless others within the state of Israel today.

understanding of belonging at the same time that it requires particular religious rules and rituals whose implementation are made to charactarize the national group' (2019, 167). Ultimately, it is only possible to be fully ethically and morally 'Israeli' by being Jewish; but one must be a particular type of Jew. By including the rabbinate, etc in the state apparatus, the nation-state inadvertently put 'religion' back in the identity formation of its people. Now, the Marxist dreams of the early Zionists are not to be: even if a Jew wishes to work on the farm during Shabbat, he cannot, or the food produced will no longer be kosher (Ibid., 26).

Unfortunately, Haredim are not the 'correct' type of Jews, either. Dalsheim suggests that this is because they are not adequately part of the labour market (Ibid., 99); while that may be so, their lack of participation in labour is only one form in which Haredim do not properly participate in the state of Israel. The Haredim are also not good Zionists; they view Zionism as a secular ideology (which it is, of course), but even more repugnant to the Haredim is the idea of Religious Zionism. Religious Zionism, or *Dati Leumi*, is now the most prevalent form of Zionism in Israel (Ibid., 190). This is an *hashkafa* that combines Zionist ideology with religion; an unsurprising development given the enmeshment of religious regulation in the secular Israeli state. It is, however, perceived as even more dangerous than secular Zionism to Haredi ethics (Ibid., 101). In return, the state and the majority of the Israeli polity view the Haredim as pariahs for their avoidance of army service. Service in the IDF is one of the most fundamental roles for a citizen to play (Lavie 2018, 84-85).

Thus, the Haredim have occupied, and continue to occupy, a place of precarity in the Israeli state, as all minorities do in modern society (Mahmood 2016, 6). *Agudat Yisrael* continued to act as a political party with the interests of the Haredi minority as its sole concern; in the late '80s, a moderate schism occurred between the powerful Hasidic groups in *Agudat Yisrael* and the Litvish leaders, and another political party was formed, called *Degel HaTorah* ('Banner of the Torah'). In most general elections, *Agudat Yisrael* and *Degel*

HaTorah join forces under the banner of United Torah Judaism. The Sephardi Haredim, who will be a significant subject of the coming chapters, also have their own party, Shas (*Shomrei Sephard*, or Sephardi Guardian [of the Torah]) , which formed under Rabbi Ovadia Yosef in the mid-1980s. Shas and United Torah Judaism often work in concert in the political life of Israel today. Both advocate for the interests of religious minorities within the modern state of Israel. It is with this understanding, of the Haredim as a minority within Israel, that the remaining portions of this chapter, and indeed much of this project, are understood. This also underpins the focus of this work on Haredi identity and Haredi society, because identity is most powerfully constructed by those who are placed on the margins of society where everyday resistance becomes the most powerful weapon of the weak (Ben-eliezer 2004, 256-258).

Increasing Stringency After WWII and *Yeshiva* Study for Men

When understanding what 'Haredi' became in the new state, it is important to consider the transformative effect of the Holocaust on Eastern European Jewry, and the refugees who came to the new Jewish state immediately following the War of Independence. Ninety percent of Polish Jewry had been slaughtered in the Holocaust (Bacon 1996, 281), and the religious, especially the Hasidic community, lost proportionally more than any other Jewish group. Almost all of the students and teachers of the great *yeshivot* of Eastern Europe were lost, with the exception of the *Mir Yeshiva*, which was revived first in Shanghai during the war, and eventually in Brooklyn. Belk, Kahn, and Szendroi has been studying changes to Hasidic Yiddish, and posits that the trauma of the Holocaust has caused over 200 years worth of linguistic change in the last fifty (forthcoming 2022); it would seem a similar loss of learning and wisdom occurred, which, compounded by the trauma experienced by survivors, may have accelerated the increase in stringency of religious interpretation which was to

follow in the Jewish State. Ultimately, as a result, the *Agudah*'s focus on *yeshiva* study became central to the ideology of re-shaping a post-Holocaust religious Judaism, in order to redeem the Jewish people and the world.

In the 1950s and '60s, *Agudat Yisrael* established a certain level of religious underpinning for the Jewish State through political alliances with the Religious Zionists and others on the newly formed *Knesset*. Through the representation of *Agudat Yisrael*, 'Haredi' became a recognised and designated sector of the population, separate from other religious Jews. Internally, the *Agudah* solidified the ideology of *Da'as Torah*, ensuring political power for the great religious thinkers who would emerge in the future (Bacon 1996, 296). Ben-Gurion, as mentioned previously, offered an initial postponement of mandatory army service to four hundred *yeshiva* students in Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, and Safed; this would ultimately transform into a complete exemption (Stadler 2009, 99). Ben-Gurion originally set up four streams of state-funded school systems, one of which was overseen by the *Agudah*; in 1953, when that system was disbanded, *Agudat Yisrael* set up an independent school system which met their interests even more completely: despite receiving approximately 70% of its funding from the government, the system was subject to no government supervision (Efron 2003, 50-51). By 1958, however, only 56% of Haredi men over the age of twenty-five had ever studied in a *yeshiva*; about 36% of those who did spent more than sixteen years doing so, and the majority only spent between one and eight years doing so (Regev 2013, figures 8 & 9). Haredi life still remained quite similar to religious Jewish life in Eastern Europe in the 19th century.

The Haredi population in general was also quite small at this point: in 1960 only 6% of all primary and secondary school students in the country were Haredi (Weiss 2019, 34). However, over the course of the 1960s, *yeshiva* ideology began to grow; in 1968 the *Knesset* essentially doubled the number of military exemptions for *yeshiva* students to 800 (Efron 2003, 53). Over two thirds of Haredi men who were between the ages of twenty-five and

thirty-four in the same year had studied or were currently studying in a *yeshiva*; nearly half of that generation of *yeshiva* scholars would spend more than sixteen years studying in a *yeshiva* (Regev 2013, figures 8 & 9). This was the beginning of the gradual increase in stringency of interpretation of *halacha* by Haredi rabbinical leaders in Israel; as discussed above, this is due largely to the loss of wise leaders in the Holocausts, and the Haredi desire to heal the world following both the Holocaust and the *Haskallah*. I would also suggest that the new Israeli context provided a backdrop for this strong approach: rather than differentiating themselves from a non-Jewish 'other', as they had in Europe, Haredi Jews now faced a Jewish 'other', whose religious practice was laced with secularism. For men, this increase in stringency resulted in the increased focus on *yeshiva* study; women have faced ever-increasingly strict modesty standards, but this will be addressed more particularly in Chapter Three. There has also been greatly increased pressure to produce large families, but that burden has really become one that is equally shared, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

While *yeshiva* study increased in the '70s and early '80s, other demographics remained similar to before in the Haredi community. In 1978, 76% of Haredi men aged between twenty-five and thirty-four had studied or were studying in a *yeshiva*, and 53% of them would spend sixteen or more years doing so (Ibid., figures 8 & 9). However, Haredi men were still entering the workplace following these years of study: 85% of Haredi men aged thirty-five to fifty-four in 1979 were employed, most of them in non-education sectors, meaning they weren't teaching in a *yeshiva* (Ibid., figure 13). 58% of Haredi women remained unemployed (Ibid., figure 13). Birth rates had not yet increased significantly; in 1980, only 4% of all primary and secondary school students were Haredi (Weiss 2019, 34). However, change was coming.

The 1977 Israeli election saw *Agudat Yisrael* back in political power for the first time since the Ben-Gurion era, as part of a right-wing coalition (Stadler 2009, 99). Prime Minister

Menachem Begin promised *Agudat Yisrael* a great many policy changes in return for their support for his government; the most important of these was the increase in funding provided to *Agudat Yisrael* schools, and the removal of the cap on military exemptions for *yeshiva* students (Efron 2003, 53). In 1977, it became possible for Haredi families to grow as large as possible, without the danger of their sons being forced to serve in the IDF. This shift, however, unsettled several of the delicate balancing acts which had been maintained since the founding of the state. Other Israelis resented the fact that the Haredim now had significant power in policy-making, but still demanded exemptions from civil service (Stadler 2009, 99). From the 1980s onward, anti-Haredi politics became a winning platform (Efron 2003, 55).

The 1977 policy changes also disrupted internal politics in the Haredi community itself. Until now, this discussion of Haredi identity has carefully avoided non-European aspects. This is not a mistake or an oversight; Ashkenazi Jews have largely defined the Haredi identity and created a hegemonic culture which has marginalised many of those of other ethnic backgrounds. There were, however, significant numbers of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East who emigrated to Israel within the early years of the country's existence, usually fleeing serious persecution. The vast majority of these Jews were very religious, but their observance looked very different from the observances of the Jews of the *Agudah*. A significant portion of this dissertation focusses on discrimination against Sephardim in Haredi society, and so I will not dwell overlong on that here. Suffice it to say that the new school funding was disproportionately distributed in favour of more Ashkenazi areas, at the expense of Sephardi neighbourhoods throughout the country (Ibid., 54). In 1984, the newly-formed Shas party entered the general election for the first time (Ibid., 54). Many Litvish Haredim also supported Shas at first; the Hasidic dynasties, like the Gur, which had held much of the *Agudah* power in Poland had maintained power in Israel, and the old conflicts between Litvish and Hasidic had been re-emerging. By 1988, the Litvish camp had split completely

and created their own party, *Degel HaTorah*, with the Belzer Hasidim, who had always been ideologically opposed to the Gur (Bacon 1996, 304). That same year, Shas received 4.7% of the popular vote, gaining them six seats in the *Knesset* (Efron 2003, 54). Power was shifting.

The late 1980s did not show too much change from the '70s in the number of Haredi men enrolled in *yeshiva*, with enrolment holding steady at 77% (Regev 2013, figure 8). However, nearly two thirds of those enrolled would end up spending sixteen or more years studying in *yeshiva* (Ibid., figure 9). The more significant change in the '70s and '80s was the new de-emphasis of secular education for men. In 1988, only 39% of Haredi men aged twenty-five to thirty-four received a *bagrut*, the Israeli matriculation certificate, similar to an American high school diploma (Ibid., figure 7). While some Haredi men in that generation did complete secondary education without earning a *bagrut*, 38% of Haredi men aged twenty-five to thirty-four in 1988 had only achieved a primary school level education or less (Ibid., figure 7), drastically reducing men's employability. This trend would only increase over the next twenty years.

In 1990 and 1995, Haredi male employment overall held steady at approximately 50% (Regev 2013, figure 1), but by 2000 only about 42% were employed, and by 2005 Haredi male employment had decreased to 40% (Ibid., figure 1). However, the '90s saw a significant spike in *yeshiva* attendance: 85% of Haredi men between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four in 1998 had attended or were attending *yeshiva* (Ibid., figure 8). A third of them had achieved a *bagrut*, but nearly half had not even received secondary education (Ibid., figure 7). Meanwhile, ill-feeling toward Haredim had been growing throughout Israel, and in 1999 the Tax Committee was formed to find a solution to the problem of Haredi draft refusal: they created the *Nachal* Haredi unit (*nachal* refers to the type of brigade), which operates separately from the rest of the army, maintains religious observance, and is not open to women (Stadler 2009, 99-100). It should be noted that many Chardal [a combination of

'Haredi' and '*Dati Leumi*', used for Jews who are both extremely religious and extremely Zionist] and *Dati Leumi* men join this unit, and that while some Haredim do, they are mainly *yeshiva* drop-outs (Ibid., 100) as I will discuss in later chapters. Despite the growing tensions against Haredim, however, Shas did extremely well in the 1999 elections, gaining 17 seats in the *Knesset* and establishing itself as the third largest party in Israel (Efron 2003, 54). Many non-Haredi voters must have voted for Shas, indicating that while it is a Haredi party, it's secondary goal of Sephardi equality outweighed distaste for Haredim, at least among Sephardim. This is an element of Israeli voting behaviour that should not be forgotten in the future.

The first decade of the new millennium saw this gradual increase in stringency reach its pinnacle. *Yeshiva* enrolment was at its highest, at 90% (Regev 2013, figure 8). Only 19% of men aged twenty-five to thirty-four had achieved a *bagrut*, and 58% of the same population had only had secular subjects to the primary level or less (Ibid., figure 7). For Haredi men aged twenty to twenty-four in 2008, only 5% received a *bagrut*, and 68% had only a primary school education or less (Ibid., figure 7). Efron recounts a chance encounter with two ten year old boys in Beitar, a Haredi settlement in the West Bank, in which he chatted to them about maths and geography: both boys had ceased study of secular subjects two years earlier; neither knew long division, and both thought the USA was in Europe (Efron 2003, 51).

While the earning capacity of the Haredi men was dropping, the Haredi population was exploding. This was compounded by the extremely young age of marriage at the time: between 2003 and 2004, the marriage rate of Haredi people aged twenty to twenty-four was 61% ('Statistical Report' 2018, 6). In 2000, 12% of all primary and secondary school children in the country were Haredi (Weiss 2019, 34). This is triple the proportion in 1980. From 2003 to 2005 the Haredi fertility rate was at its highest peak in the history of the state of Israel, with an average of 7.5 children per woman ('Statistical Report' 2017, 6). By 2009,

the total Haredi population in Israel was approximately 750,000 ('Statistical Report' 2017, p. 4 figure 1).

The aughts continued to see a rise in animosity towards Haredim from the general public, especially in the form of the *Shinui* party, a political party whose sole platform was an identity as an anti-Haredi party (Ibid.: 100). The founder of Shinui, Tommy Lapid, is the father of Yair Lapid who ran in the 2019 elections with *Yesh Atid* (Efron 2003, 14) and has just become Alternate Prime Minister through a coalition government. The *Shinui* Party won fifteen seats in the *Knesset* in 2003, though a subsequent internal party split ultimately meant that *Shinui* was not a viable party after 2006. However, political rhetoric introduced by *Shinui* continues to be part of mainstream political discourse, including perceptions of Haredi as draft dodgers and parasites on the state; there are also aspects of the discourse which mirror liberal feminist post-colonial white discourse in that Haredi women need 'saving' from backwards, oppressive culture (Abu-Lughod 2013, 27-30).

The most recent decade has shown some significant shifts in the number of both men and women receiving advanced degrees, a relative drop in the Haredi fertility rate, some increase in employment, and other qualitative change on a fairly rapid scale compared to the gradual increase of the past sixty years. Facts and figures only get us so far in comprehending the changes in Haredi society today; my ethnographic research instead presents a picture of Haredi identity that sometimes confounds definition, and often provides a glimpse of what is to come for the devoutly religious of Israel's future.

Perceptions of Historical Social Change

Women with whom I conducted research are not unaware of the changes in Haredi society. Though there is some rhetoric of 'continuity with an imagined past' (Fader 2009, 161), in general women were aware that the current social norms of *yeshiva* study are different than they were historically.

‘Today, Haredi men hold themselves to a very high standard,’ Bina said, seriously. Bina is a *frum* from birth [expression for people raised in the Haredi world] Litvish woman who was born in the New York area, but has lived in the Jerusalem area for more than thirty years. She also reflects that men are doing more today; there is a pressure to learn all day, but they are also dealing with more familial responsibilities. ‘There’s more learning now, but it used to be simpler. You know, the Chafetz Chaim, he achieved such a great level of learning, but he also was a very successful grocer. Men used to be able to achieve high levels much more quickly. Now it takes more to get to that level.’

This situates the increase in yeshiva studies as a moral and ethical imperative; the stain of secular sin has disadvantaged even those who deny themselves it, and the work of learning Torah for *tikun olam* (literally, ‘healing the world,’ alluding to the fact that all souls will be made whole and complete when the messiah comes), is that much more difficult because of the illness of society as a whole. Thus, engaging in *yeshiva* study becomes a constant critique of the secular modern. Men removed themselves from the secular-religious binary, and ensconce themselves completely in the religious. This further centres women as the ones who do the work of knitting, because they have more with which to contend.

Michal Tchernovitsky, a *frum* from birth woman who has become a household name as a politician with the Israeli Labour Party, *Avodah*, connects the social changes to political changes, specifically those during the alliance of Menachem Begin with the Haredi political parties.

‘So I think that – first of all, it has changed,’ Michal explains, when I ask her about *yeshiva* study. ‘The [Haredi] mainstream has changed. Like you say, it has become more radical, more Torah study. All this Torah study is because of Begin, it’s from 1977. No, it existed before, but he cancelled the quotas. Until then there were quotas for Torah scholars. There is that line – from 1977 when the quotas were cancelled, the number of children in

Haredi families grew, and men's participation in the labour market dropped. At the same time. Nothing happens by chance.'

Michal reflects on the changes within her parents' lifetimes, and within her own lifetime. She remembers growing up with a television; over time, the family was pressured to use only the radio. Her father had a profession while spending time studying in a *yeshiva*, and the family believed in secular education, alongside religious education.

'So what I'm saying is that my parents were like that,' she says, 'but they were completely Haredi. I don't think that anyone would have thought of saying to my parents, "You're not Haredi." They may say it to me—' she says this with a wry smile. She has spoken about how her political life has led people to question if she is really Haredi. She continues, '—but who would have said that to my parents? I mean it is precisely today, it's strange, like once it was much more— There are indeed processes that Haredi society is undergoing – radicalisation etc. But— but I'm trying to think. Like… In Haredi society most people worked, most of the men worked, they always did. Maybe some worked without paying taxes but they worked. There were always large parts of Haredi society who lived with one foot – who did not live in the ghetto, yes? Who lived with one foot here and one there… and I'm not even speaking about all the Haredim in the periphery.'

Michal knows that society has changed, and in many ways. She says that people lived with aspects of both the religious and the secular in their life, but that now, the religious world has tried to exclude the secular as much as possible— what she refers to as 'living in the ghetto.' She calls this increasing stringency 'radicalisation.' Furthermore, she suggests that these changes have transformed how Haredim see other Haredim, as 'authentically' Haredi or not, depending on their degree of contact with the secular world. Historically, she suggests that a balance of religious and secular life would have still been accepted as legitimately Haredi. Now, to be truly Haredi, men must only choose the *yeshiva*, and must

spend as much time in *yeshiva* as possible.

Haredi Society Today

The statistics do show certain changes in the Haredi community in the last ten years. The likelihood of marrying very young has dropped slightly ('Statistical Report' 2017, 6), and the fertility rate between 2012 and 2014 was down to 6.9 from 7.5 nine years prior (Ibid., 6). The Haredi marriage rate remains very high, at 82%, compared to 63% in the general Israeli population (Ibid., 5). While the economic situation remains fairly grim— as of 2017, 62% of Haredi children lived in poverty (Ibid., 12)— the rate of child poverty is declining gradually, and the earning capacities of Haredi households are improving. The last ten years have shown a gradual increase in male employment without a corresponding drop in female employment (Weiss 2019, 56). This is an indication of significant social change: previously, late 20th century, when men entered the workplace around age thirty-five to forty, after studying for close to two decades in the *yeshiva*, typically their wives would leave their employment (Regev 2013, figures 11 & 12). Today, Haredi homes are more likely to have double income; furthermore, Haredi households spend on average 15% less per month than other Jews despite their larger household size ('Statistical Report' 2017, 12). However, debt among the lowest income Haredim is more likely, and more substantial than among other low-income groups (Weiss 2019: 97). Elderly Haredim are also more at-risk, because both men and women suffer from loss of pension income due to earlier career breaks for childcare, *yeshiva* study, etc (Ibid., 101). While these numbers show that change has occurred, they do not explain the causes and reasons for these changes; fundamentally, that is the more relevant information for promoting an understanding of Haredi society.

Conclusions

Haredi identity formed in response to the dual threats of secularism and nationalism. Religion was created as the enemy of the secular state; religious people in turn believed secular values were the enemy of religious ethics. They sought to resist secular incursion. In order to do so, religious leaders were forced to participate in the secular political system, and thus form some form of political representation for religious interests. This resulted in *Agudat Yisrael*, and the principle of *Da'as Torah*. *Agudat Yisrael* was both a religious organisation and political party, which transformed religious leaders into politicians; *Da'as Torah* established religious authority over all aspects of life. Thus, Haredi religious identity became inseparable from Haredi political identity. This became further entrenched in the state of Israel, where not only were Haredim differentiating themselves from a Jewish 'other', the state which claimed to be secular also regulated significant portions of religious life and maintained certain expectations of what it was to be a proper Jewish citizen. Haredim function within the state of Israel as a minority, and act to protect their own interests and resist the demands of the state. These identity formations imposed by the secular-religious binary has led to an increase in stringency of observance within the Haredi community in Israel, which is articulated as an emphasis on *yeshiva* study for men, in contrast to the state's expectations of army service. Thus, in this chapter, we can understand how Haredi identity formed as a response to secularism and the state, and how Haredim function as a minority in the state of Israel, negotiating their own religious values with the impositions of the state, and therefore establish the enmeshment of the religious and the political in their identities as Haredim in Israel.

In this chapter, the discourse of Haredi identity has been established, and the initial fabric of Haredi society has been formed. This chapter allows us to understand the complex forces at play in Haredi women's work of knitting together Haredi identity in later chapters. It also

begins to establish why Haredi women are central to the processes of social and political change in their communities, by establishing male identity as one that remains mainly in the religious sphere. Women, as we will learn in Chapter Three, are put in the complex situation of negotiating their community's relationship with secular influences. They are cast as the knitters in the complex scarf of Haredi identity where the secular and the religious co-exist, and even complement each other, despite perceived opposition.

Chapter Three: What Does It Mean To Be A Haredi Woman Today?

In the previous chapter, I established that Haredi identity was formed as an enmeshed political-religious identity in response to secularism and in resistance toward the state; the result of these negotiations has been an increase in stringency of observance for the first sixty years of the state of Israel. This chapter explores what this increase in stringency means for women, as opposed for men, whom we have established have been expected to invest heavily in *yeshiva* study. Women have instead faced increasingly stringent standards of modesty and emphasis on gender separation.

This chapter also seeks to investigate the claim that Haredi identity is built around resistance to the state and secularism, which was established previously. What role do women play in this resistance? Does this hold true for women who have no role in the *yeshiva*? If women do not resist the state through *yeshiva* study, how do they enact the political portion of their identity? And to what extent is the enmeshment of the political and the religious evident in their identity? How do women do Haredi identity? Ultimately, this chapter argues that Haredi womanhood is shaped by modesty and gender separation to create women who support men in *yeshiva* study by protecting them from the secular world; Haredi women are nonetheless conscious of the political dimensions of their identity and proffer a political understanding of their role in Israeli society as much as a religious one. In this way, certain secular strands are already knitted into the scarf of Haredi identity.

I argue that the increased emphasis on modesty for women is an inevitable result of the combination of both Hasidic and Litvish tradition in the Haredi present-day community. This emphasis on modesty is important in that it is the mechanism which shapes women into ethical Haredi persons; it also has significant implications for the non-Ashkenazi women who

became part of the Haredi world in Israel. These women have faced, and still face, significant prejudice in the Haredi community. Discrimination against non-Ashkenazim maintains a discourse centred around modesty and piety, which are features of cultural racism (Ben-eliezer 2004, 254). Nonetheless, non-Ashkenazim are a significant part of the Haredi world in Israel, and the non-Ashkenazi women's experience is part of the greater picture of what it means to be a Haredi woman, and the reasons behind the changes discussed in subsequent chapters. Indeed, non-Ashkenazi women are some of the most important drivers of change in the Haredi world. This emphasis on modesty shapes women into pious beings who support men in *yeshiva* study; women also participate in their own forms of resisting the state. Because other religious women in Israel also invest in modesty and their roles as support to their husbands, this political element becomes the part of Haredi women's identities which distinguishes them from their *Dati Leumi* sisters, because *Dati Leumi* is, by definition, Religious Zionist. Instead, Haredi women are not Zionist. While the most extreme Haredi women may be considered anti-Zionist, the majority of Haredi women are not anti-Zionist. They are simply not Zionist; they are non-Zionist. Though my research was chiefly conducted among women, due to the same standards of gender separation and modesty applying to me in equal measure, I believe the political identity explored in this chapter is representative broadly of most Haredim, men and women alike. This chapter establishes the role of Haredi women in Haredi society, so that we can better understand their agency, their acts of knitting and unpicking, which are explored in subsequent chapters.

Why Modesty?

Mahmood's research with Muslim women in the Egyptian mosque movement suggested that some religious women are shaped into pious subjects as docile bodies which inhabit the norms of their religious contexts (Mahmood 2005). In a similar approach, Avishai suggests

that Orthodox Jewish women 'do religion' as a 'semi-conscious, self-authoring concept' (Avishai 2008, 413), much in the same way that Butler proposes we perform gender (Butler 1990). However, there are many ways in which my interlocutors inhabit norms that are no different from the way in which Avishai's non-Haredi Orthodox women 'do religion' (Avishai 2008). Therefore, the following chapter concerns the ways in which Haredi womanhood has developed as a form that differentiates itself from other Jews in the state of Israel.

Increasing stringency in the Haredi world since the founding of the state of Israel has resulted in different consequences for women than for men. Women have experienced increasingly strict interpretations of modest standards of dress and comportment. Separation of the genders has also become more emphasised, resulting in the exclusion of women from previously mixed spaces, such as community festivals and celebrations. This is not uncommon in non-liberal religious communities faced with the moral dilemma of secular legal frameworks (Asad 'Free Speech' 2013, 22-23). These forces of change have shaped Haredi women's identity, both as women and as people with internal religious ethics. Womanhood is centred around marriage and motherhood; however, women also must support their husbands in achieving Haredi manhood through *yeshiva* study, and so Haredi womanhood has come to also encompass working outside the home and mediating secular influences. Haredi women are thus placed in the position where they are provided with a host of secular ideas, and they must choose from this basket of yarn what to select for the scarf of Haredi society. While the demands of Haredi piety may seem overly harsh, they nonetheless provide Haredi women with a great deal of agency, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Haredi womanhood differentiates itself from other Jewish forms of religious womanhood through an investment in the idea of the imminence of *moshiach* [messiah], which is brought through women supporting men in their pursuit of *tikkun olam* [healing the

world] and raising Jewish families. Haredi womanhood is also distinguished from other religious Jewish forms of womanhood through attitudes towards the religious texts and performance of religious observance, and a rejection of certain types of religiosity which appear too nationalistic. Many women still profess a form of Haredi identity that is inseparable from a political identity, where Haredi personhood is related to how one votes in equal measure to how one observes Judaism.

Increasing stringency leading to increasingly strict modesty has implications for Haredi women's livelihoods, leadership roles, and self-expression. It is because of the increasingly strict modesty standards that women's-only performing arts spaces have been created and proliferated, due to the Talmudic injunction of *kol isha*, which effectively prohibits women from performing for mixed audiences, among other interpretations. Stringent modesty standards have also been complicit in the erasure of Sephardi and Mizrahi cultural differences within the Haredi world, and modesty is central to the discourse surrounding discrimination against Sephardim in the Haredi world. Haredi identity is complex and under multiple, contradictory pressures, and women are often at the centre of these pressures and contradictions.

The Clothes Make the Woman

The first time I met Esther Goldman in person, the first thing she told me was that the costume choices for characters in *The Mask She Wears* were not meant as a basis for judgment of the *halachic* decisions which the characters make.

I had only just made the blessing on my water, and was taking a sip as she told me this, and I used the time to swallow and set the cup down to hide my confusion about why she was leading with this piece of information.

Why would Esther believe that I thought the costume choices were an indication of how to judge the characters? I reflected on the three main characters in the play, assessing,

possibly for the first time, their outward identities.

Rivka, who struggles with poverty, was the most *chassidish* in costume choices: her *sheitel* [wig] was chin length and dark brown, she wore a collared blouse with an argyle cardigan, and a pleated skirt which hit mid-calf. Bassi's *sheitel*, while longer, was still above the shoulder, and though her skirt was sometimes floor-length, her sleeves were always long. Shani had a long, beautiful, light-coloured *sheitel*, and wore more colour and more jewellery. Her skirts were also long. Shani's story contained perhaps the most *halachically* distressing dilemmas, including a husband who doesn't fulfil his obligations to *Hashem* ['the name' used for God], and the contemplation of divorce.

Was Esther telling me this because people actually believed that the horror with which Shani was living was an indictment on her long *sheitel*?

Upon further reflection, this is not such a ridiculous concept for those women living within the Haredi community. In March 2020, a rabbi in Bnei Brak announced that wig lengths were the reason why the novel coronavirus outbreak had struck. A year before that, another rabbi had blamed long-haired *sheitels* for the measles epidemic— long *sheitels*, and smartphones. A rabbi the year before had blamed a deadly car accident on wig-length, and by extension, the vanity of women, as well. Women's bodies, dress, and comportment have become a massive focus within the Haredi world; while men have no choice but to pursue *yeshiva* study, women have no option but to conform to stricter and stricter standards of modesty or face exclusion from the community. Part of this is a greater emphasis on separation of the sexes, as well, and these things have far-reaching consequences in the lives of women.[5]

Esther didn't intend for modesty standards to invade the interpretation of her play, but she

[5] These themes do not only affect Haredi women; Avishai discusses a rabbi who suggests that women's lack of modesty has been the reason for many ills faced by the Jews in her ethnography of *Dati* women (Avishai 2008, 418).

could not avoid the pervasiveness of modesty culture. Yet upon greeting me, a woman entering her home with a clear Jewish identity externally in my dress, she felt the need to acknowledge the implications of modesty culture, and warn against the incursion of such judgements in her own work.

Tsnius

Modesty is an unavoidable subject in contemporary scholarship surrounding religious women, as modesty often becomes the site of secular-religious conflict due to the primacy given family law as a place of religious reproduction (Mahmood 2016, 9). With the increasing stringency articulating itself in terms of modesty for women, modest dress and comportment are central aspects of education and socialisation for girls in the Haredi world, both in Israel and abroad (Fader 2009, El-Or 1994). However, within the Haredi world, the concept '*tsnius*' is not simply "modesty". Rather, *tsnius* was described to me thus by a Karliner Hasidic woman who works in girls' schools:

> 'There was one child, I remember, I think she was a sixth grader [age eleven or twelve], and we talked about *tsnius* because that's an issue that's always addressed. And I asked them if they could define it. And one girl said, I'll say it in English, but she said, '*Tsnius* is something that doesn't attract the eye, or it's not out of the ordinary, out of the usual.' For example, by us, wearing long [skirts] is not considered *tsnius*. Why? Because it's not the norm. In other words, normal is to wear clothes not down to the floor. … And that is a very good definition of *tsnius*. In other words, nothing that catches your eye.'

Tsnius is about blending in, and conforming to social standards. It is about being part of the greater whole of the religious community, and eschewing attracting attention to individuality.

Ba'alos teshuvah speak about *tsnius* as a transformative act. "*Tsnius* is the act of presenting yourself as a spiritual entity," says Yehudis, an actor and playwright. Other *ba'alos teshuvah* spoke about *tsnius* much the same way as Miriam, a Bostoner Hasidic woman in Kaufman's study:

> '"[Y]ou know what the concept [*tsnius*] means? … It is such a wonderful way

> of presenting oneself…. It means you should present yourself as caring, soft-spoken, gentle, you know… in a feminine way. That's what orthodoxy is really all about. [*Tsnius*] doesn't just apply to women; it's meant for all Jews. We are supposed to be separate, different, apart… different from a world that can do such things as a Holocaust…. The world needs more of what we do as women naturally. We must teach and guide men."' (Kaufman 1991, 45)

These articulations help clarify several important points of *tsnius*: first, that it has do with conforming and being a part of a larger social whole; second, it is about behavior in addition to dress; third, it is connected with a form of femininity which is embodied across genders; and finally, it is about forming a Jewish ethical personhood. Mahmood suggests that, in what she terms non-liberal religious understandings, the relationship between interiority and exteriority is inextricably linked, and bodies become docile, performing Foucault's 'techniques of self' to create an ethical personhood (Mahmood 2005, 30). Therefore, the exterior performance of these docile bodies becomes integral to creating the interior ethics. Mahmood states: "[F]or the women I worked with, this relationship between interiority and exteriority was almost reversed: a modest bodily form … did not simply express the self's interiority but was the means by which it was acquired" (Ibid., 161). The relationship between interiority and exteriority within non-liberal personhood is in direct contrast with the modern liberal-progressive understanding of one's ethical self producing the exterior embodiment of the self. In non-liberal religious understandings, the way a person dresses and comports themselves can cultivate their ethics: in effect, their comportment can be a strong influence on their interior ethics. *Tsnius* is the embodiment of this personal ethical cultivation. A book for *ba'alei teshuvah*, Gila Manolson's *Outside Inside* (Manolson 1997), articulates *tsnius* within the same exteriority-interiority language used by Mahmood herself. The body, therefore, becomes the docile subject which is formed through *tsnius* to create the ethical Haredi Jewish personhood.

The increasingly stringent interpretations of *tsnius* have manifested chiefly as a focus on standards of dress and separation of the genders; there has also been an increasing emphasis

on the *kol isha* prohibition which I will discuss below, and the erasure of images of women and girls, which I discuss in Chapter Six. The emphasis on standards of *tsnius* dress has become a significant focus of girls' schools, where teachers may patrol the halls with rulers to measure skirt length. The emphasis on dress standards has not only affected the Haredi world in Israel; in Fader's study of women and girls in the Hasidic communities of Borough Park, Brooklyn, dress standards were a huge focus of the girls' schools. Women also articulated the power of modest dress to improve their relationship with God and help them gain blessings, such as falling pregnant (2009). I found this phenomenon of modest dress as negotiation with God was largely limited to the Hasidic women whom I encountered in Israel, and even then, stringent dress standards was more of a question of the right level of *shidduch* [marriage match]. A marriage match could legitimately be turned down on modesty grounds.

For example, an older Karliner Hasidic woman told me her niece turned down a match because the prospective husband wanted his wife to wear a turban with a bow as her head-covering. Her choice to reject the match on these grounds was not considered overly picky, as other reasons may have been; instead, this seemingly superficial reason was accepted by all parents and the matchmaker. The choice itself may have been a symbol for the overall greater stringency that may have been represented by households which use the bowed turban; she may have been rejecting all the other attached stringencies implicit in the head-covering choice. It may have also been a convenient way to reject a match with which she was uncomfortable. Either way, it is an example of how a young woman may levy agency during the matchmaking process; I explore religious women's agency in more depth in the fifth chapter. It also demonstrates that, in mainstream Haredi society, women are, to a certain extent, agents of the level of modest dress to which they adhere. In Fader's work, women voluntarily took on more stringent standards of dress to achieve certain goals; in my research,

women generally chose the level to which they adhered within the spectrum of acceptable standards of modest dress in the Haredi world.

Choice and agency is, of course, mediated by the education and social pressure that exists in the community, and the fact that the very nature of *tsnius* implies conformity. Furthermore, groups which are more generally stringent in all aspects of observance are more likely to have rabbinical leaders who directly decree how women should dress. For instance, the Satmar rebbe dictates that all married women must shave their hair, for immersion purposes; other Hasidic women with whom I spoke may have chosen to, but their rebbes did not necessarily decree it. The Belzer rebbe dictates that women should only wear short *sheitels*, and in addition, they must wear some sort of hat or other symbolic covering on top of the wig, to be doubly sure that a man can see on sight that women are married. At the very extreme end, I saw women in Beit Shemesh and the Mea Shearim neighbourhood of Jerusalem wearing what some secular Israelis call the *frumqa*, a combination of the words *frum* and burqa, because it looks exactly like the black burqa worn by women on the Arabian peninsula. Other girls and women wore poncho-like *shals* to hide the space between their arms and their sides, and the shape of their bodies. Even the stringent *Eidah HaChareidis* rabbinical court has condemned these practices, suggesting that such coverings are a complete misinterpretation of Jewish law; these women were therefore likely part of extreme fringe sects like the *Lev Tahor.*

Litvish women, however, choose a wide variety of head coverings, including *sheitels* of various lengths and colours, and observe shirt and skirt length standards which vary from elbow to wrist, and from covering the knee to the ankle. Many Hasidic groups have similar flexible approaches. It is also worth noting that even within these somewhat narrow conceptions of dress for women, women have far more ability to express individuality in their outward appearance than do men. Men almost universally wear some variation of black and

white; for those few Hasidic sects which instruct men to wear a coloured *kirtl* or striped stockings, all men in the sect wear the same coloured *kirtl* or the same stripes, thus erasing any sense of individuality. In this, we see the conformity of *tsnius* applied across genders, and the idea of a communal religious personhood is made obvious.

The increasingly extreme separation of the genders has resulted in women being excluded from previously shared public spaces and roles. Some women in the community are aware of these changes and increases in stringency; they may embrace the change, or they may criticise it. Others are unaware of these ideas, instead investing in the idea that they live, dress, cook, behave, and even think the same way that their grandmother, great-grandmothers, and great-great-great-grandmothers did in Eastern Europe (Fader 2009).

I bring up these changes with Michal Tchernovitsky, a Haredi politician who was, at the time of our conversation, on the *Avodah* [Israeli Labour Party] list. Before I can even finish phrasing my question, she exclaims,

'Whoah! Yes, so much!'

She says the 'radicalisation' in the Haredi world is most evident in the separation between the sexes.

'It's crazy,' Michal says. 'It's not only *tsniut* [she pronounces it in the Modern Hebrew way]. I really don't care about the clothes, but as I see it the problem is less the clothes and more the separation! It's simply unbelievable. From age three. And now they're expanding it. I mean, if you ask someone today, "What is Haredi life? – What does Haredi life mean to you?" "Separation between men and women." …It's like – the radical separation between men and women came from the Hasidic world and the matter of only studying Torah came from the Litvish world and then it became a mixture of [the two].'

Interestingly, Michal distinguishes *tsnius* from gender-separation, suggesting that *tsnius* is only related to clothing. This is likely due to the emphasis on dress standards in Haredi

schools; the broader understanding of *tsnius* as applying to comportment, behaviour, and both genders, has been greatly de-emphasised in the curriculum. I would, however, place both the emphasis on clothing and the extreme separation of the genders under the umbrella of stringent *tsnius*. This is due to the nature of the reasons behind these stringencies, which is to protect men from the temptation of their *yetzer hara*, their evil inclinations.

The focus on gender separation is behind two other significant changes: the *kol isha* prohibition, and the erasure of images of women. Both of these stringencies have arisen from the emphasis on protecting men from temptation. The erasure of images of women in children's books, newspapers, advertisements, magazines, websites, and more, is part of the discussion in Chapter Six, because it is at the heart of the criticisms of the Haredi Feminist Movement. *Kol Isha*, however, needs some explanation before we explore the other topics, because it has led to the flourishing by-women-for-women performing arts movement.

Talmud Brachot 24a contains the single prohibition, *kol b'isha erva*, 'the voice of a woman is like nakedness'. Historically, this sentence has been interpreted to apply to prayer, suggesting that women and men should pray separately, or that women should not raise their voices too loudly in singing the prayers in synagogue, lest a man have impure thoughts while praying. Some very religious rabbinical leaders have historically applied this to women's singing and speaking voices in general circumstances, but until the twentieth century, these rabbis were viewed as extreme. However, as part of the increasing stringency, this has been used to prohibit mixed-voice singing, women's solo singing in front of mixed-gender audiences, and women's public speaking for mixed audiences. In certain extreme groups like *Lev Tahor*, it has also been behind prohibitions against women speaking at all during certain times of the day; this has been denounced by almost all other Haredi leaders.

Most *frum* from birth women with whom I conducted research were comfortable with this prohibition as applied to women's singing; there was varied level of support for it as applied

to public speaking and women's leadership roles. *Ba'alos teshuvah* had somewhat more trouble accepting it, especially if they had been singers and actors before becoming religious. However, both *frum* from birth women and *ba'alos teshuvah* women spoke about *kol isha* in similar terms, citing it as evidence of the 'wisdom of *Hashem*' and suggesting that *kol isha* attributes great power to women's voices, rather than removing their agency.

Batsheva, a 32-year-old *ba'alas teshuvah* who has six children ('so far,' in her words) and lives in Bnei Brak with her *frum* from birth husband, tells the story of her marriage, as illustration of the truth of *kol isha* and the wisdom of *Hashem*.

'Do you know how I met my husband?' she asks me, blushing.

'Oh, do tell me,' I say, 'I love a good *shidduch* story.'

'Well, that's the thing,' she says. 'We weren't a *shidduch*. We met at a mixed [gender] *shabbos* meal. It was early in my process of becoming religious, and I didn't know all the ins and outs yet. And we were both invited, with a bunch of young people, to this family's house. They're a little modern— I mean, they're *frum*, but they're maybe a little more modern than us now. And so we were mixed singing before we ate. I didn't know about *kol isha* then, I was still singing in front of men. And he was there and he heard me. And then, like a few weeks later, I was at a party in Nachla'ot. I wouldn't do it now, but back then I was still a little secular, and it was a Carlebach thing. And, we, well— we didn't do anything we shouldn't have, but he asked for my number. And he called me the next day. He had basically fallen in love with me because he heard me singing.'

She was blushing brilliantly pink by this point, which was highlighted by her naturally ginger hair showing at the edge of her *tichel*. Before becoming religious, Batsheva was a vocal performance major at one of the most well-known conservatories in the United States.

'I put him off, I told him to call me back in a year, if he still wanted to date me. But he called back a month later, and we dated for three months, and then we got married.'

'Well, it seems to have worked out,' I say, remembering the natural rapport I had seen between her and her husband on a *shabbos* at their house.

'Yes, but that's the thing. It shouldn't have worked,' says Batsheva. 'I asked the Rav about it later, and he said it shouldn't have worked, but it did. But that's why it's not hard for me to follow *kol isha* now. There's no denying the dynamic. *Hashem* made it very obvious for me. There is so much power in a woman's singing voice. And yes, in case you were wondering, I still sing for my husband. But there's more to our relationship now, obviously.'

Kol isha attributes incredible seductive power to the female singing voice; while the feminist movements discussed in Chapter Six dispute the use of the *kol isha* prohibition when used to prevent women from speaking in public, there is no significant organised push-back against the prohibition as it relates to singing. This may be due to the incredible women's-only performing arts world that has been created around it, which I discuss at length in Chapter Five. Ultimately, all aspects of *kol isha* as it is interpreted today are as a result of the increasingly stringent modesty standards in Haredi society in Israel today.

Modesty, the Sephardi *Olim* Encounter, and Discrimination in the Haredi World

This process of increasing stringency presented a unique dilemma to certain groups of religious Jews who moved to Israel as *olim* during the first years of statehood.[6] In the first decade and a half of the existence of the Israeli state, more than 1.4 million Jews, from mainly Muslim nations, moved to Israel (Lavie 2018, 51) in 'traumatic displacements' (Shohat 2017, 4). Jews coming from North African and Middle Eastern countries had very different traditions, practices, and lifestyles than their Ashkenazi counterparts. Zionist

[6] Some non-Ashkenazi Jews were living in the Holy Land prior to the creation of the Israeli state; some had always lived in the land and were Palestinian Jews, and others were recruited by Zionist settlers in Ottoman and Mandate Palestine to come and work as labourers (Lavie 2018, Shohat 2017).

discourse in the new State relied on the idea of Arab 'otherness'; essentially, Jewishness was defined by its non-Arabness (Lefkowitz 2006, 263; Shohat 2017, 3). Lavie suggests that the goal of the early Israeli state was to secularise the Mizrahim in order to Judaise the State (Lavie 2018, 20), and Shohat concurs, adding to that mission the effort to 'cleanse Sephardim of their Arabness' (Shohat 2017, 44). Indeed, Shohat and Egorova view these tasks as forms of colonialism (Egorova 2015, 502), and the role of European Zionists as similar to other colonisers in the guise of a 'civilizing mission' (Shohat 2017, 3). The result of this has been an ongoing 'three-way identity struggle' (Lefkowitz 2006, 263) between Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, and Arabs within Israeli society which endures today. By the late 1990s, there was a 40% income gap between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim within Israel (Lavie 2018, 11), which is accentuated by the extreme gender pay gap in Israel, resulting in the harshest of disadvantaged situations for Mizrahi women (Ibid., 13-14).

These groups were no less religious than the Ashkenazi Haredim who were powerful in the new state. Lavie notes that working class Jews from North Africa were particularly observant (Ibid., 48). Indeed, some Mizrahim, such as the Bukharan Jews from the Central Asian Plateau, were known for their incredible levels of religious learning. Yet, as they arrived, these *olim* were told that if they were religious, the boys would go to *yeshiva* and the girls would learn to be modest wives and mothers.

This expectation, to conform to a specific type of religious Judaism, has been applied to new immigrants in Israel again and again. Ethiopians were subjected to such expectations, among other ordeals, in their *aliyah* ['going up', term used for Jews who immigrate to Israel through the Right of Return] (Schwartz 2001), as have the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng (Bernstein 2016), and the *Bnei Menashe* of India (Egorova 2015). In the case of the *Bnei Menashe*, Egorova notes that 'transnational migration can involve consolidation of specific forms of identification and has the capacity not only to unsettle but also to reinforce social

categories to suit the political agenda of the "host" society' (Ibid., 494). In the case of *Bnei Menashe*, the Jews of eastern India conform to 'look Jewish', especially through dress (Ibid., 499), but also through embracing certain types of religious behaviour, observance, and belief (Ibid., 494). Whereas for the *Bnei Menashe* this has been a source of 'positive self image' and feelings of religious superiority (Ibid., 495), the same cannot be said for the non-Ashkenazi members of the Haredi world to whom I spoke.

Modesty, or the Ashkenazi understanding of it, became central to the assimilation of the Sephardi and Mizrahi *olim* in the Haredi world. This represents a form of cultural racism present in Israel long before Ben-Eliezer's Ethiopian Jews encountered such (Ben-eliezer 2004). Many of these *olim* were exceptionally modest, according to the countries from which they had originated, which meant that their modesty standards were aligned with the majority Muslim culture of their diasporic contexts. For instance, a Yemenite Jewish woman was likely to cover herself from head to toe, but these coverings would be colourful, covered with intricate embroideries and embellishments. Men's shirts would be similarly decorated, as might their head-coverings. For men, this did not find acceptance: they were instructed to dress in the black-and-white uniform of the *yeshiva*, or face exclusion.

For Sephardi and Mizrahi women, the modesty assimilation question remains central to their Haredi identity even generations after their parents made *aliyah*; despite being fully assimilated, Sephardim face strong prejudice in the Haredi world, and for women, the rhetoric of discrimination suggests that Sephardi women are innately immodest and sexual. This likely originates from early encounters between Hasidic Haredim, who view bright colours, especially the colour red, as provocative and sexual, and the colourfully dressed *olim*. The enduring prejudice also reeks of Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Orientalist ideas of *ars erotica* (Foucault 1990); it is the myth of sexual permissiveness which pervades cultural racist forms as well (Ben-eliezer 2004, 254).

Esti Shushan is one of the leaders in the new Haredi Feminist Movement. She is a founder of *Nivcharot*, a Haredi women's rights organisation which I discuss at length in Chapter Six. Esti is also not Ashkenazi. Her family history is representative of the *olim* experience.

'Originally I am from the north. I was born in Tsfat [Safed], and my parents originally came from Morocco. They are both *olim*. But when they came here to Israel they were teenagers and they came to Haredi schools. Then they got married and they made a whole Haredi family. I was the oldest child, in a big family of 12. My mother got married—she was very young. She was about 17, and she didn't give birth in the first five years. And she tried a lot, and went to the doctors, the hospitals, tried to understand what's happening. But the fact is that I didn't want to get born to a child! Because she was a child! Always, I told her, what do you want? I don't want to be raised by a child! I just want to wait. So, after five years, they got a blessing from one famous rabbi, and they become parents and I was the first one. After that, it became a large family, *bli ayin hara*, twelve children.'

Esti's parents arrived in Israel as young, impressionable teenagers, and were immediately enrolled in Haredi schools; schools which rapidly assimilated them into the Ashkenazi norms of Haredi culture. School is often a way to force rapid assimilation (Ben-eliezer 2004, 251). Here, Esti also displays her wry sense of humour, as well as her engrained self-image as strong-willed and rebellious. But she recounts her own upbringing as the same process of *Ashkenization*, assimilation to Ashkenazi cultural norms in the Haredi world.

'I grew up in *Beit Yaakov* [the Modern Hebrew pronunciation of *Beis Yaakov*], it's the Haredi school. For seminary I studied here in Bnei Brak. I came to Bnei Brak to study,' she says. Her husband is also Sephardi, and both he and her father have spent much of their lives studying at *yeshiva*.

Michal explains, '[The Ashkenization of Sephardim] it's part of the Haredi world. As I

said, here there are mainly Ashkenazim. Obviously, there are also Sephardim but…,' she pauses. 'The Sephardic *yeshivas* are Ashkenazi too. They are pseudo-Litvish.'

What Michal and Esti are talking about is the separate-but-equal (Goodman et al. 2020, 73) educational world for Sephardi Haredim. Due to the gradual exclusion over time of Sephardim from Ashkenazi Haredi educational institutions, Sephardim have founded their own Haredi *yeshivas* and religious schools. Rather than being sites of Sephardi cultural reclamation, however, these institutions reinforce Ashkenization, following the same dress-codes and traditions as their Ashkenazi counterparts. The *yeshivas* mirror the Litvish *yeshivas* which they emulate, and are sometimes even counted as Litvish institutions in government statistics (Regev 2017). The Sephardi Haredi education system has effectively become a tool to impose a form of acceptable Ashkenized Haredi-ness, a site of Haredi cultural production (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

The erasure of Sephardi and Mizrahi culture through Ashkenization has taken multiple forms. Lavie describes the obscuring of Mizrahim through the state census process; it is more likely for Mizrahi women to marry Ashkenazi men than it is for Mizrahi men to marry Ashkenazi women, and the children who result from these unions are thus classified as Ashkenazi (Lavie 2018, 4). This process is accentuated in the Haredi world, where, in all marriages, the family follows the *minhag* [custom, practice, or tradition] of the husband, and wives' non-Ashkenazi identity disappears. These are erasures of non-Ashkenazi culture entirely; but there are also erasures of distinctive cultural difference among different groups of non-Ashkenazim.[7] Ultimately, this essentialises cultural, ethnic, and racial distinctions in favour of a 'brown' (Sephardi) and 'white' (Ashkenazi) rhetoric (Goodman et al. 2020, 45-52).

As Esti and I spoke, she began to use 'Sephardi' and 'Mizrahi' interchangeably.

[7] Ben-Eliezer calls the erasure of distinctive differences the 'harbinger of racism' (Ben-eliezer 2004, 250-251).

‘In education, as a Mizrahi girl,’ she said, ‘I was educated in Ashkenazi schools.’

‘Right,’ I said, ‘*Beis Yaakov*.’

‘Beit Yaakov, yes,’ she answered. ‘I have Sephardi friends, but we were a minority in the Beit Yaakov in Tsfat.’

‘Wait,’ I stopped her. ‘Mizrahi? Not Sephardi?’

‘Mizrahi, Sephardi, it’s the same,’ she answered, dismissively. She clearly did not believe this was an important point to clarify.

‘It is?’ I said, confused.

‘It is the same, yeah,’ Esti said.

‘Ok,’ I said.

‘Here, it’s the same,’ Esti explained, seeing my confusion. ‘Like, it’s not the same meaning, but in Israel, when you say “Sephardi” or “Mizrahi”, it’s the same. It’s all the people that came from the Islamic countries, to Israel.’

‘Yeah,’ I say, ‘But North Africa is different than Yemen, yeah?”

‘Yes,’ says Esti, ‘it’s totally different. But here, we are all in the same class.’

‘Ok,’ I say, nodding. ‘They are not Ashkenazi.’

‘Yeah,’ Esti says. ‘They are the “others.” So, as the “other,” I think that’s one more reason for my politicism. But when you’re a Haredi girl, you’re not used to voicing your opinions. In my family, my mother always told me I had *chutzpah* [brazenness, audacity, gutsiness]. It’s like, I have an opinion, and when I talk, it’s like a bad thing.’

Our mutual confusion over terms is unsurprising. It seems that the academic world is also confused by these terms, and use ‘Sephardi’ and ‘Mizrahi’ almost interchangeably. Shohat uses ‘Sephardi’ and ‘Sephardi Jews from Muslim countries’ (Shohat 2017, 37) to describe the same historical events and themes as Lavie describes using the term ‘Mizrahi’ (Lavie 2018, 1-4 and Shohat 2017, 3-44). Goldberg and Bram (2007, 229) discuss the inadequacy of the

umbrella term ‘Mizrahi’ for the vast plurality of cultures and ethnicities included therein, from the Jews of China to Middle Eastern Jews to Ethiopian Jews. Lavie claims that ‘Sephardi’ refers to a certain style of liturgical melodies rather than an ethnicity (Lavie 2018, 1). Shohat uses ‘Sephardi’ universally in her 2017 volume at the exclusion of any other term for non-Ashkenazi ethnicity, and suggests that the Mizrahim are an ‘imagined community’ of Zionist invention (Shohat 2017, 113). I learned, growing up as an American Jew, that ‘Sephardi’ meant ‘the Jews of Spain’ and could be used to refer to Jews from North Africa and Latin America, the places to which Jews fled the Spanish Inquisition. ‘Mizrahi’ was a term I learned as an adult, and I understood it to apply to any Jew who was not Sephardi or Ashkenazi, as suggested by Goldberg and Bram above. Shohat recounts the birth of the term ‘Mizrahi’ during the Israeli Black Panther movement in the 1970s (Ibid., 70-113), and Lavie suggests it was not fully adopted within Israel until the 1990s (Lavie 2018, 4). Lavie uses Mizrahi exclusively as a term of empowerment; Shohat has done the same by reclaiming the term ‘Arab Jew,’ which became an anathema to the Zionist ideal (Shohat 2017, 3). Suffice to say, the confusion of terms which I encountered in my interaction with Esti is rooted in the greater Israeli discourse around Jewish identity, and the implications of erasure and oppression of non-Ashkenazim are evident in the Haredi world as much as in the greater Israeli context.

It is important to note that Esti, in her upbringing, is corrected for her un-womanly behaviour with a Yiddish word, *chutzpah*, a distinctly Ashkenazi language, so complete is her mother’s assimilation. Here, we see the erasure of the distinctions between Sephardi and Mizrahi made obvious, but also a clear understanding of the implications of these erasures in Esti’s articulation. Lavie tells us that race and class completely overlap (Shenhav and Yonah, 2008 [Hebrew] and Yitzhaki 2003 [Hebrew], as cited in Lavie 2018, 24). Esti says that what matters is that they are not Ashkenazi; they are ‘others’, and all the same *class*. She is fully

aware that it is her race which makes her disadvantaged in Israel; in the Haredi world this is further emphasised through the separate sphere in which the Ashkenazi elite majority[8] keep non-Ashkenazim.

Esti's explanation also highlights another element of prejudice surrounding Sephardim: their origins in majority-Muslim countries. '"Arab" and "Jew"… came to form mutually exclusive categories, with "the Arab-Jew" becoming an ontological oxymoron and an epistemological subversion' (Shohat 2017, 4). This distaste for the idea of the Arab-Jew is present, and perhaps even more accentuated, in the Haredi world. While there may not be significant discourse around the Arab-Israeli conflict in Haredi communities, there remains a high level of prejudice towards Arabs, Palestinians, and Muslims in general. All non-Jews are worthy of distrust, and non-white non-Jews are more worthy of distrust than most. This is unsurprising, given the reliance of the construction of the Haredi identity discourse on 'othering' (Pratt 2003, 10), and the fact that racism is the national evolution of ethnocentricity (Goodman et al. 2020, 11). Many of the Chasidic conversations I have heard around race display blatant anti-black racism. However, the worst level of racism in the Haredi world is directed at anyone who is perceived to be Muslim, including Arab Christians, because some Haredim are not educated enough about other religions to be able to know the difference. Indeed, non-Arab Muslims are also considered 'Arab' in Haredi discourse, and anything 'Arab' is considered to be essentially bad.

When speaking with Miriam, a Litvish mother of thirteen in Modi'in, I mentioned that some of the women with whom I conducted research were Sephardi Haredi. I suggested that their experiences might be different from her own.

She frowned.

[8] In the Haredi world, non-Ashkenazim are the minority. However, non-Ashkenazim are the majority of Jews in Israel (Lefkowitz 2006, 16-17).

‘Yes, there is a problem today in the Haredi world with Sephardim,’ she said. ‘There is a difference, I don’t know why. Their homes are more violent, maybe because in Arab society there’s more violence.’

Her statement was offered straightforwardly, and almost naïvely: she truly wondered why these people might be so different from her. She views Sephardim as a ‘problem’ and it is almost difficult not to make the comparison between her words and the so-called ‘Jewish problem’ of European history (Shohat 2017, 75). Furthermore, she draws a conclusion about Sephardim based on a prejudice concerning Arabs, and she categorises Sephardim with Arabs, the ultimate non-Jewish Other, rather than viewing them as Jewish, as one of her own people. This is classic cultural racism, which is based on based on distancing oneself from ‘the “other” fundamentally different [culture], an invader who must be kept at a distance and who has no place in society’ (Ben-eliezer 2004, 249).

Miriam is not remarkably more racist than any other Haredim, nor is she seemingly conscious of her words being racist. She is simply voicing the accepted cultural norms, things that she and her peers would say to each other. She likely has no awareness of the perception of her words as essentially racist, both towards Arabs and Sephardim. Though in the moment as the ethnographer I struggled to hide my disappointment in her response, I did manage to conceal my own feelings, and the conversation moved on without incident.

Not all parts of Haredi society are as comfortable with prejudice as these experiences suggest. Bina worked for Shas for twenty years, though she is Ashkenazi. When I asked her about prejudice, discrimination, and inclusion of Sephardim in Haredi society, she declared:

‘In ten years it’s not going to matter. No one cares these days. My nephew just married this beautiful Moroccan girl, she’s so dark and lovely. Their kids will just be Jewish. Everyone is intermarrying now, by the next generation we will all just be Jewish. The differences will be gone.’

On the surface, this looks like an affirmation and acceptance of Sephardim in Haredi society. On closer examination, there are several problematic statements. Bina's words, 'The differences will be gone' are revealing. What Bina means is that Sephardim will be assimilated; the non-Ashkenazi elements will have disappeared. Complete cultural erasure will have been achieved. When she says, '…by the next generation we will all just be Jewish,' what she really means is that by the next generation they will all just be Ashkenazi. In this moment, Bina is revealing her unconscious participation in an over-arching trend in Israel, where Ashkenazim of all backgrounds claim that discrimination against non-Ashkenazim do not matter because the differences among Jews are disappearing (Lefkowitz 2006, 15). The myth of the prevalence of mixed-marriages is a part of the Zionist ideology of the in-gathering of nations (Lavie 2018, 4), though I am not sure Bina is conscious of performing nationalism; perhaps this is an example of Billig's 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995). Nonetheless, this positivistic claim of acceptance is actually an encouragement of the erasure of non-Ashkenazi difference and a tacit acceptance of the erasure of diversity. This erasure is a fundamental part of cultural racism (Ben-eliezer 2004).

Furthermore, Bina describes her new niece as 'beautiful' and 'dark and lovely.' However kindly meant, this is an exoticisation of Sephardi women, as mentioned above in terms of Orientalist erotic tropes (Foucault 1990). Though Bina's sexualisation of her Sephardi niece takes the debatably more positive form of exoticism, sexualisation of Sephardi women and girls is a rampant form of prejudice in the Haredi world, and usually is not as innocuous. In cultural racism, a 'litany of familiar terms [are] invoked again in order to display the "others" as ignorant, irresponsible, and having a different conception of sex and sexual permissiveness that differed from the … norm' (Ben-eliezer 2004, 254). Tzirele, a Chasidic woman, heard my question about prejudice toward Sephardim, and was quick to correct me:

'It's not colour based. It's cultural. You know, if they really want to culturally fit in, they

can get in. But if not, then you're not fit to go to that school. I don't want my sweet *chassidishe* [Hasidic] little girl exposed to that. Because Sephardi culture is more… expressive… they're just less refined. They're loud. It's about refinement.'

This is cultural racism as both fear of contamination and over-sexualisation (Ibid.). Furthermore, Tzirele suggests that the ultimate problem with Sephardi culture is a modesty problem. 'Refinement' acts as a code-word within the Hasidic world (Fader 2009); a 'refined' woman is one who is properly Hasidic, properly *tsnius*, and does not draw attention to herself. By calling Sephardim unrefined, she is essentially calling Sephardim vulgar and immodest. This is further emphasised by her choice of 'expressive' and 'loud.'

Tzirele's attitude typifies a theme in discrimination against Sephardim in the Haredi world. Ruth Colian, a Sephardi *ba'alas teshuvah* who is the founder of *U'bizchutan*, the Haredi Women's Party, has experienced extraordinary exclusion and discrimination based on her Sephardi identity. Though she has been subjected to abusive language in multiple circumstances, her battle for her daughter's inclusion in a majority Ashkenazi religious school will be the focus of this analysis.

Where Ruth lives in the Petach Tikvah area, there are two different Haredi religious girls' schools: one, the *Beis Yaakov*, is primarily host to Ashkenazim, and the other, a Shas sponsored *Ma'ayan HaChinuch HaTorani* school, was designed specifically to educate Sephardi Haredi girls who were excluded from the *Beis Yaakov*. Exclusion from school is another mainstay of cultural racism (Ben-eliezer 2004, 254-255). The *Beis Yaakov* has a much better reputation, and provides a higher quality of education, both secular and religious. Ruth naturally wanted her daughters to attend the *Beis Yaakov*, but when she called to enroll her oldest daughter, after they asked her name, she was told the class was full.

'When somebody tells you you can't do something,' Ruth says, 'it actually shows you *their* limits, not yours.'

Ruth set out to fight for her daughter's place at the *Beis Yaakov*.

Cleverly, she called the school again, and when they asked her name, this time she told them an Ashkenazi name; not only an Ashkenazi name, but a name with a high level of *yichus* attached. *Yichus* is status, based on ancestral heritage of the Torah learning of the men in the family. By nature, it is impossible for non-Ashkenazim to have established *yichus* because the *yeshiva* tradition is so new to those outside of Eastern Europe.

'I called, and I said that my name was Grennemann,' Ruth said. 'And the secretary said, "Ok." I said, "Are you sure? There is a place for my daughter at the school?" But the secretary said, "Yes, it's ok, we have a place for her for sure."'

Armed with the knowledge that openings existed— and with a recording of the phone conversation— Ruth went to the school office.

'The next day I went to the school, and…' Ruth points to her face, 'and I am not Ashkenazi. And so she says, "Your daughter cannot go to school here."'

Though Ruth made her case politely, the woman was adamant. Ruth felt humiliated. She revealed that she was the woman named Grennemann, who called about the place; the secretary denied any memory of the conversation, and Ruth revealed that she had made a recording of the conversation.

'She told me I did not have enough modesty for the school,' Ruth explains.

Because of the strict modesty standards which schools expect, the dress code can be a tool of school exclusion. Combined with the prejudice that Sephardim are immodest, this becomes a de facto form of school segregation. After repeated attempts to get her daughter enrolled in school, Ruth wrote a letter appealing to the Ministry of Education for Independent Schools, under which religious school jurisdiction falls.

Finally, two days before the school year was going to begin, Ruth was contacted by the Office of the Supervisor for Independent Schools, and told that she would be able to enrol her

daughter in the *Beis Yaakov*, but that she would have to come to the Office and sign some papers.

The day of her appointment, which was also the day before the start of the school year, there was a suspicious object at the bus station in Jerusalem, and she was delayed because of the evacuation. Ruth therefore arrived late to the appointment. Though the bomb scare was common knowledge in Jerusalem that afternoon, the Supervisor for Independent Education chose to condemn her for her lateness.

'"Shame on you! Lots of people have been waiting for you! And you're late! And you… speak! I'm sorry, we won't accept you today,"' she repeated the Supervisor's words to me.

Again, later the same day, he came up to Ruth as she prayed, and in the middle of her silent prayers, he again shouted at her, '"You don't have any shame! You dare to insult us, this is so rude!"'

The rest of Ruth's story will be revealed in Chapter Five; what I would like to highlight here is the characterisation of Ruth by the Supervisor for Independent Education, who is an Ashkenazi Haredi rabbi, as shameless and rude. These words suggest that whatever Ruth has done wrong is somehow immodest in both dress and comportment; his further accusation, 'And you… speak!' suggests that she is displaying further immodesty simply by daring to open her mouth. This is also part of what Lefkowitz describes as 'inscribing culturally devalued forms of emotional comportment onto… Mizrahi Others' (Lefkowitz 2006, 264). Inappropriate emotions and inappropriate ways of carrying oneself are viewed as particularly non-Ashkenazi, and by suggesting that Ruth has no shame, the rabbi has associated her comportment and emotions with inappropriate non-Ashkenaziness. He has also ascribed her with being 'primitive or immature… a central mechanism of cultural racism' (Ben-eliezer 2004, 254).

In the process of this battle, Ruth sought help from a powerful Shas rabbi:

‘First thing, I went to Shas,’ says Ruth, ‘because Shas is against this discrimination, Shas is fighting discrimination, and Shas is for Sephardim. And the Shas representative told me—listen, I am ultra-orthodox,’ she clarified for me. ‘I cannot do anything without *Da’at Torah* [Modern Hebrew pronunciation of *Da’as Torah*]. It’s like the rabbi confirms the act you want to do…. So I asked him to [prove to me that it’s ok to fight for my daughter’s place at the *Beis Yaakov - original in Modern Hebrew*]. … And then I spoke with the Rabbi Meir Mazuz. He’s well-known in the Haredi community— now he’s big in the Eli Yishai party. … Then he was with Shas. … He said, “My daughter, she is also in that school. I am afraid that they would take revenge on my daughter if I helped you.” I was really confused,’ says Ruth. ‘Shas was supposed to help me.’

Despite being founded in order to fight Ashkenization and discrimination, the representatives of Shas do not necessarily help Sephardim in positions of exclusion; Shas creates separate schools, which are of lesser quality, as an alternative to the *Beis Yaakov*s of the Haredi Ashkenazim, essentially furthering the unequal status of non-Ashkenazim in Haredi society. The Shas officials don’t even want to send their own children to these schools.

That Sephardim exist in Haredi society is clear and yet unseen: many people, Haredi and otherwise, have asked me in surprise, ‘There are Sephardi Haredim?’ That Sephardi Haredim exist, and that their experience is one of exclusion and discrimination, needs to be addressed by the academy. That Sephardi Haredi women’s bodies are at the heart of this prejudice, and subject to everyday political violence, also needs to be part of the greater understanding of modesty in the Haredi world in Israel today. Sephardim are not the only Haredi Jews of colour; in my research, I encountered Haredi women from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, including East Asian, African American, Ethiopian, North American indigenous people, and South Asian. I have begun to build an understanding of the

experience of Haredi women of colour within this work, but further research is called for, and there is a rich diversity in the Haredi world that needs to be made more visible.

Mothers and Wives

Sephardi and Ashkenazi women in the Haredi world experience the same expectations of marriage, wife-hood, and motherhood, regardless of their ethnic background, though the confluence of race and class will inevitably affect each woman's experiences of these expectations.

'When a Haredi woman graduates from high school, she enters the world of *shidduchim*,' says Michal. The process of matchmaking, finding one's *shidduch*, is complex; other scholars, such as Ayala Fader (2009), have written extensively about this process; my research surrounding *shidduchim* is more concerned with women's agency within it, as discussed above and later in Chapter Five. Suffice to say, there is incredible pressure to make a match fairly quickly, though there is room to reject matches and choose. 'We joke that a girl is an old maid if she's not at least engaged by eighteen,' an older woman in the Karlin-Stolin Chasidic community told me. 'But the pressure's the same on the boys. They get married the same age these days, or at most a year or two older.'

There is also incredible social pressure to have children as soon as possible; this is especially true in the more stringent communities, but it is changing in some Hassidic communities and much of the Litvish world. Before marriage, men attend lessons with *chasan* 'husband' teachers, usually a rabbi; and before marriage women take classes with *kallah* 'bride' teachers, either one to one or in classes, known as *kallah* classes. These classes now often continue through the first year of marriage; in certain sectors of Haredi society, there is increased emphasis on taking things slow and using the first year of marriage to 'get to know' each other, before having children. There is, nonetheless, great social pressure to

have children, whenever it may happen. In certain communities, the pressure to have a baby by one's first wedding anniversary remains.

'I got married at about 19. My husband is from the North, so, not from Tsfat, but from [Tiberias],' Esti tells me as we sip our drinks in a cafe. 'I became a mother at 20. At about 26 I had my third, no, fourth child. … The Haredi women have a unique lifestyle. They get married early. They don't have the time for themselves. They are big sisters for families of sisters, of large families, and after, they just grow up, they get married. Most of the time they don't have education. Like me! I am the story of a lot of women, a lot of Haredi women. … And they become mothers very early.'

One Saturday evening, late, I attended a *melave malka* ['escorting the Queen', a joyful event at night after the sabbath has ended to prolong the feeling of the sabbath] at one of the large wedding halls in the Haredi neighbourhoods of Jerusalem. It was a fundraising gala for the organisation *Ateres Kallah*, which acts as a charity to support brides and new wives who come from very little financial means. I was told about the event by a Hasidic woman, and the location was at the junction of the Ezrat Torah and Kiryat Belz neighbourhoods, so I was not surprised to see a mostly Hasidic audience coming into the hall over the first few hours. I was attending because one of the most well-known singers in the Haredi women's arts scenes would be performing; I was also eager to hear the *shiur* to be given by Rabbanit [a Rabbi's wife who is respected for her wisdom in her own right] Yemima Mizrahi, who was listed on the advertisement as the main feature. I arrived early, having caught the first available bus when they started running again after the sabbath ended, and a young Sephardi woman who also arrived early attached herself to me. We watched the other women arrive over the first two hours, and she exclaimed over the beauty of the Belzer Chasidic women as they came in groups of two, four, and ten.

'I think they're still wearing their *shabbos* best,' I said, watching a young woman run in

almost girl-like enthusiasm towards a group of her friends. She had a chin length brown wig, made of real human hair, with the customary hat on top; her hat was a cloche with black lace with touches of real, white pearls. Diamonds glittered at her throat and on her ears, and on her ring fingers where she clutched a fur stole across her chest.

'Oh, no,' the Sephardi woman said, 'I see them walking on the street and they *always* look this good. I don't know how they do it. I never look nice.'

For nearly an hour she waxed lyrical about the beauty of the Hasidic women, and how refined they were, and how much she wanted to be like them. While this seemed most flattering to the Hasidic women, I could not help but feel this represented an element of internalised racism following my discussions with other women. The language which women had used to condemn non-Ashkenazi women was now being espoused by this Sephardi woman as her ideal, the thing she wanted to be and could never achieve.

I opened the pamphlet which I was given at the door. It was emblazoned with the words, 'Small acts, blossoming results,' and then informed the attendee, 'Through Ateres Kallah, every kallah [sic] receives a complete package of top quality housewares delivered to her door! With the finest in kitchen, bath, home goods and bedding, each Kallah [sic] is able to begin her future with true simcha [sic] [joy].' There was a list of donation amounts and the items which each amount would contribute: Dairy Pots NIS100, Meat Pots NIS200, Shower Curtain NIS35, 2 Mattress Protectors NIS88. The back read, 'Each year, Ateres Kallah distributes hundreds of packages to needy kallahs [sic] in Eretz Yisrael [sic] [the Land of Israel]. Contact us to find out how you can get involved.' And: 'A branch of Ateres Kallah, Gemach [a free loan society, usually themed around specific objects] Beis Freidah was opened six months ago in response to an overwhelming demand. We wanted to offer each kallah something new towards her chasuna [wedding ceremony] and our gemach is designed as a little boutique, with beautiful new clothing and shoes so kallahs can have a store-like

experience.'

The hall was becoming quite full by this time, and seats were becoming scarce. Chayelle Regal, of Regal Productions in Beit Shemesh, took the stage, and introduced the 'guest of honour', Tammy Karmel. Tammy was wheeled to the front of the room; she has ALS, and is unable to speak, or use her arms or legs. Her personal nurse attended her, a Filipino woman and the only person in the building dressed in trousers, with a huge smile the entire time. Lizzy Serling sang *Aishes Chayil*, a song sung at *shabbos* based on the text of Proverbs 31, to Tammy, and then a video played with a message from Tammy.

In the video, the narrator explains to us,

> 'Mrs. Tammy Karmel heard that there was an opportunity for her to speak to you from the depths of her heart. Because of the ALS which she is suffering from, she now communicates by charting, looking through a plastic chart which has the letters of the alphabet printed on it. Someone then reads those letters. It's a slow and painstaking process—a two minute message she prepares for you can take up to two hours to chart.' ('Tammy's Project' 2021)

Tammy's message comes across the video:

> 'So, my dear friends, it's about believing *Hashem* is the only power in this world, even if he is hiding from you. Know that he is there! *Ayn od milvado* [there is none besides Hashem]! I've been on the *akeida* [bound, implying relinquishing control to Hashem] for the past four years and I've been saying *hineni* [here I am] for whatever Hashem wanted from me, and let me tell you how that has been an experience that has brought me to a place of contentment, and the lack of battle has been exhilarating.' (Ibid.)

This video, and the adulation of Tammy in general, is meant to be inspiring, and Chayelle described her as 'an inspiration to all of us' as she was wheeled away from the stage. However, what this video serves to do in function is suggest that no matter how bad things may be for the women in the audience, they could be worse: they don't have a life-shortening, debilitating disease. Furthermore, the woman who does, Tammy, is able to have complete faith in *Hashem*, and trust *Hashem* no matter what is happening to her. Therefore, whatever another woman is dealing with, she must trust God and not complain about what she is given. The message is, superficially, one of faith and trust; but in reality, it removes

agency from the women who watch by suggesting that they should not struggle, complain, or seek to find a way out of their current difficult situations, whatever they might be.

This message is further underscored by Rabbanit Yemima Mizrahi, when she eventually arrived close to midnight. She spoke for close to forty-five minutes, about many topics, but there were several parts which offered particular insight into understanding Haredi womanhood.

'Every Jewish life is a wedding,' she said, gazing with love on the crowd. While she spoke, she always smiled, if not with her mouth than with her eyes. She did not speak loudly— even with the microphone, her voice was soft, and small. Despite the clear evidence of her age on her face and around her eyes, her demeanour was almost girl-like. 'Every Jewish life is a wedding, because every one of your children is going to get married. And each of those children will be a wedding. And each wedding is a jewel in the crown on Hashem's head.'

She said this last part so quietly it was almost a whisper. The room let out a sigh at the image.

'And these jewels, each wedding, brings us closer to *moshiach* [messiah].'

A murmur, almost a moan, echoed around the wedding hall.

'Women, weddings, we are the jewels on Hashem's crown. And you know? Ima,' she said to the crowd, calling each of them *Ima*, mother, 'all women are the mothers of *Hashem* because of *bat ayin*. You are the daughters of *Hashem*'s eye, and *Hashem* is in each Jewish life. Each life is a world, and you are the *imas* of each Jewish life. You are the *ima* of *Hashem*.'

She encouraged each mother to show love to her children who were doing well, doing good, doing the right thing, suggesting that the matriarch Rivka showed Yaakov love, but did not show Esav any, because Yaakov did right but Esav did wrong. She concluded her lecture

with a challenge to the room: not to complain from then until the eighth day of Chanukah. It was about three weeks before the beginning of Chanukah, and so this suggested a month of avoiding any complaint. Then she asked us to direct our intentions to making every girl a *kallah*, and we *davened* [prayed] together, and the event was over.

The Rabbanit's message suggests, in conjunction with Tammy's earlier video, that there is an expectation for women to take on their roles as wives and mothers without complaint or resistance. There is a clear acknowledgement that Haredi women are presented with a range of challenges, but that rather than complaining they should instead trust completely in *Hashem*, who both meant for them to face these challenges, and will help them in surviving the situation. This is a message of acceptance and submission rather than agency and resistance; however, there is much agency and resistance in Haredi women's lives, as explored in the remainder of this work.

The Rabbanit's speech also reminds us of the purpose of becoming a wife and mother: to bring the messiah, which will of course end any need for suffering or complaints. Women bring *moshiach* by getting married and having children; the wedding itself brings closer the day that *moshiach* will come. Each child born is the potential for another wedding, and more children to be born. Fundamental to this is also the role of the wife, who supports her husband in his study at *yeshiva*, which is also *tikkun olam* [healing the world] to bring *moshiach*.

Several times early in my research, when I was only working with Hasidic women, I tried to understand the balance of responsibility in marriage, and would ask questions about how much husbands were home, helping with the childcare, and doing other household tasks.

'The most important thing is that my husband study,' was the response I would receive, repeated over and over again, until I ceased this line of questioning. Outside of the Hasidic world, it is no less important for men to study, though I didn't receive as much resistance

from Litvish women. We would move our conversations to other parts of the house if it would distract from a husband's studying, or interviews would be scheduled during night seder [a period of study]. Being a good Haredi wife means making it as easy as possible for one's husband to learn.

The Mask She Wears offers a clear vision of the ideal Haredi womanhood, though the play's purpose is not to instruct, but rather to break down the distinction between the individual and the social through women's identification with the drama they see unfolding on the stage. Through the words of the characters Rivka, Bassi, and Shani, it becomes clear that a Haredi woman should raise children and support her husband as he studies in *yeshiva*, preferably in Israel. These two things should be the deepest desires of Haredi women. '"Leave *Eretz Yisrael*? Leave *kollel* [*yeshiva*]?"' exclaims Rivka in scene two (Goldman 2016). '"This is all I've ever wanted. To support my husband in learning. To raise my children in the *kedusha* [holiness] of *Eretz Yisrael*."' (Ibid.) Upon hearing that Rivka's husband is a successful student later in the play, Shani's Thought Shadow exclaims, '"I wish my husband would go to *kollel*!"' (Ibid.)

Bassi's husband, Yitzi, also seems to excel at his *yeshiva*; whenever Bassi reaches out to him for comfort, that is where the phone call reaches him. In one such conversation, we hear them commiserate together: '"I feel like such an outsider,"' Bassi says. Yitzi responds, '"It's like we live in a parallel universe. Our whole society is based on families, on having children."' Later in the play, Bassi pleads, "Hashem, I don't know what you want from me. I've *davened* my heart out, done *teshuvah* [repentance], we've tried every school [of thought] that exists. Is there nowhere out of this never-ending nightmare? [. . .] I see pregnant women, babies, kids, everywhere I go! It's all I see! It haunts me, every second of the day, wherever I go! It's become an obsession! I'm sick of it! If I'm not a mother, then who am I? Hashem, why did you put me here?"' (Ibid., scene 13) Bassi is unable to understand who she is as a

Haredi woman if she is not a mother; there is no other way in which to be a Haredi woman.

These women, their goals and their struggles, exemplify Haredi womanhood today. Because Haredi women are expected to bear children and support their husbands in *yeshiva* study, because these are the types of values that a pious woman should shape herself to want, the characters become universal to Haredi women; the struggles of these three women thus make them relatable to the Haredi audience.

These requirements on women can lead to a false rhetoric of empowerment within the Haredi world. One night, when I was asking a million questions about women's childcare, education, and role in society, Bina declared, 'The Haredi world thinks women are superheroes. Companies seek out Haredi women to work for them, because they're such skilful multitaskers. I mean, Haredi women *are* superheroes! We never sleep, we're doing the kids and we're making the money, and look, I mean, it comes at a cost. I wouldn't be this size if there weren't drawbacks. But it's worth it.'

I heard the myth of the woman multitasker (and the man who can't) many times throughout my fieldwork. One Hasidic woman in the Hornisteipol community joked that she left her husband with the kids for one night only, and when she got home from her evening engagement, the kids were all still awake. '"What," he said, "you wanted me to do that *too*?" when I asked him why the kids were up.' The five other women in the room laughed. And yet, this myth of the woman as multitasking superhero is simply an excuse to ask women to take more on, and to expect more unpaid labour.

'But,' says Bina, 'it's worth it.'

It is worth it because it keeps Haredi society running, allows men to study more in *yeshiva*, and these things together make *tikkun olam*, healing the world to bring the *moshiach*.

In the dance school one night right before the big end of year recital, the advanced lyrical dance class has just finished a major choreography. The music is fading, but Rachel, the

teacher, shouts to keep them in place, 'Wait! Hold!'

They pause in their final forms, awaiting further orders.

'Slowly, now! Drop your arms and stand up — slowly! Gracefully! And look towards the audience. You're looking forward, out, at something distant on the horizon. Hold your gaze there! Now, that's right. Walk forward to the edge of the stage— but keep looking! Slowly, slowly. It doesn't have to be a perfect line. You're still looking out there. What's out there? Is it a little bit scary? A little hopeful? What is it? Is something coming? Is it a bomb? Is it *moshiach*?'

The girls and women gaze off into the imaginary distance, looking for, hoping for, in awe of that thing which they are all working towards, that elusive *moshiach*, the world that is whole and perfect. Marriage, motherhood, and supporting their husbands in *yeshiva* study, all without too much complaint or despair: this will make them Haredi women and bring *moshiach* soon. It also positions women as the mediators between outside and inside, secular and religious. While potentially overwhelming, this also allows women to have agency in the negotiation between the secular and the religious. They are the ones who choose the yarns of secularism that entwine themselves in the scarf of Haredi society. Women indeed do make the Haredi world go around; and they define it and shape it as they do so.

Not Zionist, but Not Anti-Zionist

Michal Tchernovitsky's family background is extremely typical of mainstream Haredi Israeli families. As she puts it, her family is 'Haredi all the way back.' Her paternal grandfather is Polish, and her paternal grandmother was in the Agudas Yisrael youth movement in Hungary, before both families moved to the Holy Land prior to the Holocaust. Once married, her paternal grandparents followed the teachings of the *Chazon Ish*, Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, a Litvish Haredi leader who was influential in Mandatory

Palestine and advised Ben Gurion on religious matters in the early days of the state of Israel. Michal's maternal family is a mix of Hasidic backgrounds, both Polish and Hungarian. She says that her various maternal cousins follow many different Hasidic traditions, but the majority are either Belz or Vozner Hasidim.

This mixing of different types of Hasidic approaches, and the intermarriage of Litvish and Hasidic backgrounds is fairly typical of Haredi society in Israel today. The differences in religious interpretation which were of such great importance in pre-War Europe have faded in favour of instead emphasising a general Haredi identity in the face of secular identity and other types of religious backgrounds. Many of the marriages discussed within this work reflect this mix of Hasidic and Litvish, or two different types of Hasidic backgrounds. Generally, the family is raised following the father's traditions.

Michal's parents married and raised a family in Bnei Brak, of which Michal is the youngest. Her childhood reflected the changes in stringency in the Haredi world: when she was young, they had a television, but got rid of it as she got older; they kept the radio, and had a mix of religious and secular books in the house. Her parents raised her with the expectation that she would attend university, not realising that the religious girls' school she attended was not preparing her properly.

She married at age twenty-one, but she and her husband struggled with fertility issues, and they didn't achieve a successful full-term pregnancy for the first six years of marriage, until they turned to assistive reproductive technologies, and Michal gave birth to twin boys. They also have another son, and a daughter. While four children is well below the average for Haredi families, Michal's small family size is more likely due to the expense and challenges of fertility treatments than because of her unique and radical choices which I will discuss later in this work. Michal's insight into her own community is breathtaking, yet she still is very enmeshed in Haredi society; she has, as she puts it, 'one foot in and one foot out.' She is

therefore simultaneously a typical example of Haredi-ness, while offering a deeper level of understanding of why she and other Haredim think and act in these ways.

When I ask Michal what it means to be Haredi, she swiftly responds, 'The Haredi community is Shas and Yahadut HaTorah [United Torah Judaism].' The answer is almost glib, and she seems to feel the glibness, because she immediately frowns and begins to contemplate a deeper answer. And yet, her answer reveals much about certain intrinsic meanings behind the categorisation and identification of Haredi. Some women—maybe all women—*do* Haredi-ness by voting for Haredi parties.

Chana, a mother of nine in Beit Shemesh, reflected that 'Haredi' felt like a political word. 'I *vote* Haredi,' she clarified. Both she and Tsirele, a Biala Hasidic woman, referred to 'Haredi' as an '*ichy*' word, which indicates their disgust with it, and suggests that they have absorbed the negativity with which the Israeli media refers to Haredim.

'The way it's used in the media leaves me with just sort of a dark, black kind of feeling,' says Chana. 'If I had to choose, I would say I'm a Torah Jew.' Though Chana's allusion to the media seems surprising coming from a woman who does not possess a television or a radio, it is less so given her Israeli context. Lefkowitz discusses the 'overwhelming presence of public discourse— media— in modern Israeli life' which dictates first encounters with the 'Other' (2006, 266). Though he was speaking of the Arab, his words could as easily be applied to the Haredi, who have become, in many ways, the unacceptable Jewish form of the 'Other' in contemporary Israeli discourse (Efron 2003). The Haredi encounter with their own 'othering' in Israeli media must be as dismal as Chana suggests.

Sarah, who is Litvish like Chana, has a similar hesitancy towards identifying herself as 'Haredi.' She is young, only twenty-seven to Chana's mid-fifties, and grew up in the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Har Nof. Now, she lives in Arzei Habira, another neighbourhood in Jerusalem, with her three young children and her husband, who spends

long hours studying in *yeshiva*. When I asked her if she identified as Haredi, she promptly replied, 'I'm not Haredi!'

I attempted to hide my surprise, and asked her instead what she would call herself. 'I'm Jewish,' she answered, which I found quite common in younger Litvisher women. It suggests both that there is unity in the Jewish people and in essence it is simply Jewishness that matters; it also serves to de-legitimise to a certain extent other forms of Jewish observance, because it is part of the discourse that Haredi Judaism is the only authentic form of observance.

In order to clarify how Sarah thought of herself, I asked questions to understand how she compared herself with other Jewish groups.

'Would you be open to living in the Gush Etzion?' I ask, referring to a settlement in the block inhabited by fairly moderate National Religious groups (Hirschhorn 2017). 'Would you be interested in performing in a Raise Your Spirits musical, then?'

Sarah is active in the Haredi by-women-for-women theatre arts world, and Raise Your Spirits is also by-women-for-women; it is, however, very Zionist in approach and ideology. Formed during the Second Intifada, its mission is to bring women together and help them find strength and joy in community in order to have courage to continue living in often dangerous situations in Judea and Samaria.

'No,' says Sarah. 'I wouldn't live in the Gush [Etzion]. I mean, I'm starting to meet some people from there, and I'm realising they're maybe more *frum* than I originally thought, but I've always thought of them as not religious enough. And I wouldn't do Raise Your Spirits, because they always do *Tanach* [Hebrew Bible] plays. I don't like *Tanach* characters. They do, like, the *Tanach* modernised. It makes me uncomfortable. The *Tanach* is kind of untouchable in my head.'

Though clearly struggling to articulate her discomfort, Sarah is revealing her own

perceptiveness about the political undercurrents of Raise Your Spirits theatre. For instance, one of the original musicals which they wrote and produced is *Ruth and Naomi in the Fields of Bethlehem*. This is, as Sarah says, a modern-imagining of the book of Ruth, which is scripture in the *Tanach*. But it also takes on a uniquely political element, because it was created to be performed by Jewish women in Efrat, a settlement located on a hill overlooking the fields south of Bethlehem. The play therefore becomes part of the political-religious ideological effort of those people living in the Gush Etzion: it is part of the discourse and rhetoric of Jewish ancestral rights to the lands of Judea and Samaria. It is taking the sacred text of the *Tanach*, which is of significance to all religious women, Haredi and National Religious alike, and conflating it with Zionist ideology.

Sarah's rejection of this type of politicisation of both the art and the *Tanach* itself marks her as a Haredi woman; she comes to this realisation herself over the course of the conversation. Some Haredi women *do* Haredi-ness by not participating in the conflation of Jewish liturgy with Zionist ideology.

'We're not Haredi and we're not modern,' she says, using a common codeword in Haredi language: modern equates to secularised. 'We're in between.' A few minutes later, she says, 'We're in the Haredi world because there's nowhere else to fit in.'

Chana eventually comes to the same inevitable conclusion. 'If I had to choose,' she sighs, '"Haredi" is what I would choose [to define myself].'

Ultimately, what 'Haredi' *is* is defined more by what it *is not*. Perhaps this is the root of Chana's reluctant acceptance: she excludes all other possible categories before recognising her adherence to Haredi society and cultural norms.

'The Haredim are not anti-Zionist,' says Michal, continuing the conversation that started with her declaration that Haredim are, simply, the Haredi political parties. 'They're not anti-Zionist but they're also not Zionist. I myself don't feel Zionist. Zionism is a language we

don’t speak. We weren’t raised with it. And Haredim are indeed not Zionist. But they are very— most of them— they are good civilians. They have a very good civic conception. They’re even patriotic.’

This hearkens back to the night of Rabbanit Mizrahi’s address at the *melave malka*. She told a story of a soldier-girl with her story of *aliyah*, in Ethiopia. ‘She was born at only seven months,’ she tells us, and the room emits a collective clucking of concern. ‘Her mother was carrying her as they were fleeing for their lives, and she was born in the middle of the desert. And they came here to Eretz Yisrael.’ She uses the term *the Land of Israel*, which Haredim use to avoid referring to the country by its name, Israel. It is a subtle refusal to participate in Zionism.

In response, the murmured phrase ‘*Baruch Hashem*’ [‘bless God’] flutters around the room, a thousand women whispering, ‘Bless God.’ The Haredi audience thanks God that Israel exists: thank God there was somewhere for her to go. Thank God the mother and child are safe, and living in the Land of Israel. Thank God they lived to have the chance for the daughter to go to the Rebbetzin’s classes, and learn about God, and become a good, religious Jewish woman.

The true anti-Zionists are the groups at the fringe: the *Neturei Karta*, the *Lev Tahor*, and the other groups that fall under the umbrella of *Eidah HaHaredis*. These groups are, to a certain extent, shunned by general Haredi society, and some groups are viewed by mainstream Haredim as not even legitimately Jewish.

‘But at least as far as the establishment is concerned, … it is either Haredi or Religious Zionist,’ Michal explains. ‘So the difference is the Zionism, like the attitude to the state. It is a completely different religion, a different theology. It’s like whether I think the state is sacred and the army is sacred and whether I say Hallel on Independence Day, meaning my attitude to the state. Or if you're Haredi then you say: The state is – Belgium and Israel are

the same. There is no difference. Maybe the opposite. So I think that's the difference.'

The majority of Haredi society negotiates Zionism and religion as separate ideologies, and can even espouse a certain amount of Zionist views, as long as these views do not contaminate the purity of religious observance and belief. Many other religious Jews are seen to have confounded religion with politics, and therefore the Haredim must seek a political identity that stands in defense of purity of religious ideology. Thus, Michal's off-hand response, that Haredi identity is effectively a political one embodied by the Haredi parties, can be understood. Haredi women select the threads of politicisation from the secular yarn basket, but reject the threads of Zionist theology when knitting the scarf of Haredi identity.

Army Service: Resisting Zionism or Secularism?

Army service is a prime example of the idea that Haredi identity is defined more by what it *is not* than by what it *is*. In the middle of our discussion of Haredi attitudes around Zionism, Michal paused suddenly, seemingly at a loss for words, a rare occurrence.

'But the matter of the army,' she began, and trailed off. Then, 'Most of the Haredim don't enlist in the army.'

But she was swift to clarify that the choice not to serve in the army was not necessarily connected with the general Haredi disengagement with Zionism. Interestingly, Michal distinguishes between the ideas of 'secular' and 'Zionist'. This may be due to another division in Israeli society, that of the left-wing secular Jew and the right-wing Zionist (Dalsheim 2019, 3); this is further discussed in Chapter Seven. However, because the Haredi identity is formed through equal resistance to both Zionism and secularism, and nationalist ideology is, essentially, a result of secular ideology as discussed in Chapter Two, I do not make this distinction.

'Like, the biggest fear of the army is of secular life. I think that's the fear. It's not really

not about being in the army. I don't think it has anything to do with the army. But I do think that ultimately today you do see Haredim going out to work, but still they're not eager to enlist in the army. Some do,' she allowed.

The IDF has recognised that Haredim fear army service for their children because of secular exposure, and has created a religious, men's-only division, which was historically called Nahal Haredi and is now known as Netzah Yehuda Battalion. Yet enlistment remains low. Michal suggests that it has more to do with Haredi cultural norms and expectations than an active rejection of the military.

'Because really, I think, let's ask why secular people enlist in the army. It's not because of the law. I mean it is because of the law but the law has become a consensus because that's what people are educated to do from the moment they are born. Like, going to the army is the Israeli thing to do. It's like, I graduate…. Of course it's the law but that wouldn't have been enough, I mean you don't have to catch people here and drag [them] from [their] homes and threaten them with jail. How many cases like that do you have? People enlist. Not everyone, but they enlist…. So, [it's] part of society.

'This simply does not exist in Haredi society. I mean, they are not educated to enlist or anything like that. They are not part of Israeli statehood. They are not part of the Israeli story. It's like an autonomy, like living in an autonomous state.'

Essentially, Haredim don't serve in the army because other Haredim don't serve in the army. In the general Israeli population, army service is part of the process of growing up: children know that they turn eighteen, they receive their *bagrut*, and then they go to the army for at least two years. When they finish, maybe they travel, maybe they go to university, maybe they go straight into work— often with skills that they gained in army service. Haredim grow up, and they think about *shidduchim* and *yeshiva*.

However, other women indicated that refusal to serve in the army might be the central

component of their Haredi identity.

I met with a Sephardi Haredi woman named Yael often, because she genuinely enjoyed chatting with me in her kitchen. Her youngest had started full-day school the year before and she said I made her house feel less empty. She was also unafraid to think critically about many of the more difficult questions I posed to her, and was an incredibly secure questioner of her own faith and assumptions. She had taught herself English, and read secular books in English to expand her vocabulary. Early in our interlocutor relationship, I wasn't sure she would identify as Haredi, but by our third meeting, I felt I could ask her directly.

'Yael, would you call yourself Haredi?' I asked, as she drained noodles in the sink.

'Yes!' she exclaimed, forcefully. 'My husband says it all the time, we are Haredi.'

Yael's declaration was easily the most enthusiastic embrasure of the 'Haredi' label I encountered in the full seven years I have spent visiting the field.

Surprised, I asked, 'What *makes* you Haredi?'

Without even pausing, she set down her colander and said, 'It's all about the army. Absolutely no army service for my kids!'

Another woman, Tovah, who is an American *ba'alas teshuvah*, answered similarly, saying that not serving in the IDF was what she felt defined her as Haredi, and though she was open to her daughters potentially doing *Sheirut Leumi* [national service (an alternative to army service for religious non-Haredi girls)], she didn't think her husband would be. She paused in our conversation, and asked herself, 'Is it [her opposition to army service] because I'm Haredi, or because I'm American?'

Nonetheless, non-participation in the army seems to be central to a significant proportion of women's perceptions of Haredi-ness, even though even in the National Religious camp many women do not serve, choosing instead to do *Sheirut Leumi*. Women feel strongly that they do not want their sons to serve, and articulate an attitude that it is 'simply not done.'

While Michal doesn't relate it to the Haredi aspect of identity surrounding not being Zionist, Yael suggests otherwise.

'We are very strongly against the army, and we are very strongly against the occupation,' Yael explains. She has recently moved to a new house, and like many Haredi families, they struggled to find a place they could afford.

'We are always really careful about not living over the line in East Jerusalem,' she explains. Surprised, I raised an eyebrow. The 'line' to which she refers is the Green Line, which signifies the pre-1967 border of Israel and Jordan. It runs through the middle of Jerusalem, but it is invisible: there is no border fence, wall, checkpoint; the line only officially exists on maps. Most of my interlocutors who were religious their whole lives, like Yael, wouldn't even know what it is, let alone where it is. Indeed, the Haredi neighbourhoods of north Jerusalem are criss-crossed by it repeatedly, and I have regularly crossed it multiple times within a day. The vast majority of the Haredim disregard the officialdom of international law as part of the de-emphasis of any secular authority, generally; though they are not ideologically invested in Zionism, neither are they part of the international discourse surrounding the conflict in support of the Palestinian right to self-determination.

'That's hard, if you're Haredi, avoiding living over the Green Line,' I say.

'It can be, yes,' says Yael. 'There were some really affordable places in Ma'alot Dafna, and a place in Givat HaMivtar that had a garden, which I wanted for the kids, but we absolutely refuse to go there.'

'Even within Jerusalem?' I ask, amazed. 'I mean, many people— most people I talk to— don't even consider those places settlements, or whatever you want to call them.'

Yael is nodding. 'My husband takes a very hard line, and I really support him in this,' she says. 'Sometimes I almost think it's why he became Haredi.'

'Wait, your husband is *ba'al teshuvah*?' I ask. I'm surprised, both because this hasn't

come up before, and because it is fairly unusual for a person who was always Haredi to marry someone who is newly religious.

She nodded. 'He was raised *Dati Leumi*,' she says. 'So he served in the army. He was actually stationed in the West Bank.'

She uses the English term that the international community uses for the disputed area to the east of Jerusalem: another surprise.

'Look, it's not my story to tell, but something horrible happened to him in the army,' says Yael. 'It was really traumatic. His head was not ok for a long time. And he became ok by becoming religious. I mean Haredi. And so he's really against the occupation, and he won't go anywhere that is supposed to belong to the Palestinians.'

The peculiarities of Yael's husband's situation may suggest that the connection between non-enlistment and resisting Zionism may not be universal for all Haredim who view army service as non-Haredi, but it does suggest that, where there is a political awareness, army service may be perceived to be connected to Zionist ideology. Furthermore, this suggests that Haredi life is considered an alternative to expectations of Right Wing Zionism for Sephardim (Lavie 2018, Shohat 2017), as discussed in Chapters Two and Seven. At the very least, army service is seen by all Haredim, even those who choose to serve, as participation in the secular world. Ultimately, in the Israeli context, the secular may be to a certain extent inseparable from Zionist beliefs. For some women, *doing* Haredi-ness means not serving in the army—which is about avoiding secularism and Zionism.

I sit back and sip my tea. She is quiet for a minute, frowning, and then she looks up and smiles. 'Anyway, we found this place,' she says, gesturing to the flat. 'I love it here. It's so peaceful. We're at the back of the building and there are all these trees, and it stays cool all summer, we don't even need the *mazgan* [air conditioner]. We are going to stay here for a while, I hope.'

Conclusions

Overall, we begin to understand through these examinations of the way in which Haredi women construct their identity, of the label of 'Haredi', and of other Jews, that Haredi women's identity is still informed by the historical roots traced in the previous chapter. Women's Haredi personhood is a type of internal religious ethic that is shaped through the external practices of *tsnius*, which not only emphasise modesty in dress, but also certain forms of comportment and conformity to community norms. The first sixty years of the state of Israel saw a gradual increase in the stringency of interpretation of these modesty and gender separation norms, with a special emphasis on the prohibition of *kol isha*, which both prevents women from taking on certain types of leadership roles, but also has fostered a thriving women's-only performing arts scene.

The emphasis on, and interpretation of, modesty standards has been extremely subjectively cultural, which created dilemmas for the Sephardi and Mizrahi religious immigrants to Israel over the course of the twentieth century. Haredi models of modesty exclude many clothing choices valued by Sephardi culture. Though devoutly religious, Sephardi lifestyles were markedly different than those of the Ashkenazi Haredi groups which had only just begun to establish themselves in Israel. Religious Sephardim encountered an attitude under which they could either conform to Ashkenazi norms, or be excluded from strongly religious life in their new homeland. This resulted in the erasure of Sephardi and Mizrahi culture within the Haredi fold, and the process of *Ashkenization*. It also provided fertile ground for prejudice against Sephardim to flourish, and this has endured. The Sephardi Haredi experience is no less legitimately Haredi, but is marked by discrimination and exclusion by their Ashkenazi peers. This is articulated in specific rhetoric relating to modesty, or perhaps rather Sephardi women's innate lack of it. This prejudice is not unrelated to Haredi attitudes towards Arabs and other non-white gentiles, as well, thus serving to

further offer a discourse of otherness around Sephardim. Sephardi women nonetheless articulate their Haredi-ness in similar ways as Ashkenazi women: it is both a political identity and a religious one, and a woman's role is to be a wife supporting her husband in *yeshiva* study and a mother raising religious Jewish children, as many as *Hashem* will provide.

Women are, however, expected to be certain types of wives and mothers: 'superheroes' who multi-task, rarely sleep, and approach their work with joy and without complaint. Through the support of their husbands, and the work that they do as wives and mothers, Haredi women are doing *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, and bringing *moshiach*, whom many believe is imminent. This both grants power and meaning to mundane tasks, and bolsters strict interpretations of traditional gender roles. It also puts them in unique positions as negotiators of the secular-religious binary.

Yet women struggle with the label of 'Haredi' itself, though ultimately most of them accept it, however grudgingly. It is, ultimately, understood to be a political identity as much as a religious one. It involves a participation in the politics of the community, and operates to distinguish the group from the rest of the country, both secular and religious nationalist. It is not, however, as strongly anti-Zionist as some of its founding roots would have suggested; while extreme fringe groups like *Neturei Karta* and *Lev Tahor* endure, they are not representative of the majority of Haredi attitudes. While Haredim may not say Hallel on Israel's Independence Day, the vast majority profess a mild form of support for the state and the ideals of mainstream Zionism, including the importance of the safety for Jews proffered by the existence of a country for Jews. Instead, the Haredi women distinguish themselves from their *Dati Leumi* counterparts in subtle ways, such as choices surrounding types of performances and interpretations of Jewish holy texts.

Ultimately, Haredi womanhood is defined by the entanglement of the religious and political, in order to conform to community norms of comportment and dress, motherhood

and wifely roles, which in turn shape an internal religious ethic. This internal Haredi ethical womanhood is one of support for her husband, children, and community, placing her own needs, wants, and individuality to the side, in order to do her part in *tikkun olam* and bringing *moshiach.* This has, undeniably, proven an ideal with which women struggle and often resist; in the next chapter I explore the changes which are shifting this ideal, and creating a more complex society than envisioned by the expectations of Haredi norms.

Thus, in this chapter, we see how Haredim understand their identity as both religious and political, and formed in opposition to secularism and the state. Women negotiate between their religious values and the demands and expectations of the state, resisting through non-Zionism and establishing a self-identity that functions as a minority identity in defence of its religious values in the state of Israel. This role makes women central to the processes of change discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Currents of Change

The changes discussed in this chapter have led to shifts in Haredi identity and politics, and they are due to negotiations between the state and religious needs and values; negotiations largely navigated by Haredi women. In the previous chapters, I discussed the formation of mainstream Haredi identity up until approximately 2010. In the past decade, modes and models of Haredi personhood have shifted significantly in comparison with the previous sixty years. There are specific circumstances which have created change. The most significant influences have been the inclusion of a large number of *ba'alei teshuvah* (those who were raised less religious and became Haredi as adults), improved secular education, and housing in new and different places. These have led to the creation of a New Haredi Middle Class, which is an acceptable form of Haredi personhood while being more influenced by secular knowledge, and sometimes more participatory in the state. Women have been central to all of these processes.

In this chapter, I argue that *ba'alei teshuvah*, and especially *ba'alos teshuvah*, are an important factor in understanding change during the last decade in the Haredi world. Because, broadly speaking, they view their choice to become Haredi as a religious choice, rather than a political one, they constantly negotiate their secular middle class knowledge and values with their new religious identity. They value arts and sports enrichment for children, as well as secular education and higher degrees. Because their choice to become religious is the ultimate critique of secularism, their secular knowledge and values are more acceptable to the Haredi world, and offer an opportunity for negotiation between the secular and religious at a community level.

I further argue that the sixty years of increasing stringency in the Haredi community since the creation of the state of Israel came to a crisis point, which has created opportunities for

improved secular education for both men and women in the past decade. Women's secular education had been improving throughout those sixty years of change, while men's secular education had significantly decreased, as mentioned in previous chapters. This led to what my interlocutors dubbed 'the newly-wed crisis' in which the religious values of patriarchy and male-headship in the home were confounded by wives with more education than men. This crisis led rabbis to advocate for better secular education for boys, and more opportunities for higher education for men. This change led to more school choice in *haskafically* Haredi schools, and the opening of Haredi campuses of major universities. This represents a negotiation between Haredi values of marriage and peace in the home, and secular knowledge; it also represents a certain victory for the state and its goal of transforming Haredi men into productive citizens. It is also a victory for women, who have not lost opportunities for higher education while men have gained.

My third part of the argument of this chapter concerns new spaces of Haredi housing, and how this has led to contact with different types of Jews and ways of being religious. These new areas of housing, both Haredi-only and diverse, offer the Haredi community opportunities to maintain religious values of large families, while keeping housing costs affordable. However, these new areas, especially in the West Bank, have turned the Haredim into agents of the state expansion project in the Occupied Territories. What this chapter makes abundantly clear is that the Haredi community is just as influenced by national and international policy shifts as any other society. Despite their avowed lack of political interest in Israeli expansionist policies, the Haredi leaders (for the most part) chose to benefit from these policies when given a choice. The implications of this for Haredi identity—and how women participate in these changes—will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

All these changes have led to the creation of a New Haredi Middle Class, in which one or both parents have higher degrees, one or both parents work in white collar jobs, and the

family is economically secure. More often than not, it is the wife who has the higher degree, if only one, or the first degree, if two. These families are fully embraced by the mainstream Haredi community; indeed, the community relies upon them for significant economic support. Furthermore, the existence of this new Middle Class offers a certain amount of appeasement to the state. The New Haredi Middle Class represents the ultimate negotiation between the state, secular knowledge, and religious values.

Ba'alei Teshuvah

A significant source of change in the Haredi world are *ba'alei teshuvah*. These newly-religious people downplay their own influence; indeed, much of their general focus is conforming as much as possible to *frum* cultural and community standards (Benor 2012). However, my research has revealed that the impact of both Israeli *ba'alei teshuvah* and so-called Anglo (because they speak English, not because they come from England) *ba'alei teshuvah* have changed attitudes in multiple fields of the Haredi world in Israel. Some changes, such as the wide introduction of artistic activities for children and adults alike, are motivated equally by the Israeli *ba'alei teshuvah* attitudes and the Anglo *ba'alei teshuvah* attitudes. Other changes are really stemming from the Anglo side, because of the backgrounds of people who become *ba'alei teshuvah* in Australia, North America, England, and South Africa. By and large, Anglo *ba'alei teshuvah* come from middle- to upper-middle-class backgrounds; most grew up in suburbia, and most have attended university; many have attended elite universities, including the Ivy League and Oxbridge. It is important to understand that Anglo *ba'alei teshuvah* view becoming religious as a purely religious choice, rather than a religious-political choice; they have therefore maintained the internal division between the aspects of their identities which are political and those aspects which are religious, and this becomes more important in Chapter Seven. This divided, internally

complex identity has meant that Anglo *ba'alei teshuvah* have also brought with them certain middle-class, secularly-educated, suburban values. This is especially true of women, who are focussed on raising their children with these combinations of suburban values and Haredi ethics. These include a desire to raise well-rounded children who have access to enrichment activities after school, and who are physically fit as well as Torah-observant. For many *ba'alos teshuvah*, city life is a bit of an anathema, and they choose to move to places that offer the suburban ideal with which they grew up. Many Anglo *ba'alos teshuvah* also maintain an expectation that their children will attend both university and *yeshiva* or seminary; this translates into a demand for higher quality secular education for both boys and girls. These *ba'alos teshuvah* knit their middle-class suburban values into the ever-evolving scarf of Haredi society. Many of these changes are widely accepted, and even welcomed, by the *frum* from birth Haredi mainstream. Some of these things hold true as well for Israeli *ba'alei teshuvah*, but *ba'alei teshuvah* who grew up in Israel tend to be from very different backgrounds than their Anglo counterparts. Many of them tend to come from more marginalised backgrounds, and have experienced some form of exclusion from mainstream secular life in Israel. Within this work, three of the women with whom I conducted research were Israeli *ba'alei teshuvah*; two of them grew up in care because their parents were unable to properly look after them, and two of them were Sephardi or Mizrahi. Furthermore, because the identity of 'Haredi' is so politicised in the Israeli mainstream media, Israeli *ba'alei teshuvah* were more likely to view their choice to become religious as both a religious and political choice, and to perceive their own Haredi identity as a political identity, as much as it is a religious one.

The Israeli *Ba'alos Teshuvah* Experience

Ruth Colian is an Israeli *ba'alas teshuvah*. Her story of becoming religious is not necessarily representative of the Israeli *ba'al teshuvah* experience; how can a single

individual ever represent the whole? Rather, her story is an example of many experiences which may happen for some *ba'alei teshuvah*; her response to these experiences is anything but ordinary. Ruth is a remarkable force of will power, energy, and intention, and her story is valuable in its exceptionalism. Nonetheless, some of her personal processes of becoming Haredi seem very representative, especially the way in which she has adopted a unified religious-political identity, and her attitudes towards the secular world. Her story is as she told it to me, in a mixture of Modern Hebrew and English; I have paraphrased her words to avoid the long linguistic tangents which we sometimes took, when Hebrew and English terms needed clarification or caused amusement.

Ruth was born in 1981 into a Sephardi family in Petach Tikvah, a city in the central part of Israel which acts as a bedroom community to Tel Aviv, and also hosts its own industry and business. She is the second oldest of four girls. By the time Ruth was seven years old, she and all of her sisters had been placed in children's homes, where they lived the remainder of their childhoods. Her father was an alcoholic, and abused her mother, making the home unsafe for the four young children. She lived in care until she was seventeen and a half, when she fell pregnant by a boyfriend. This seems to have been a time of confusion and searching: she started attending religious *shiurim* at the same time as she was involved in the relationship that resulted in her pregnancy. Her boyfriend wanted her to get an abortion, but she refused.

'I told him that if God wanted to kill the baby, he doesn't need my help,' she told me. 'So he disappeared.'

Ruth gave birth to a baby boy, alone, at age eighteen.[9] She moved with her son to Jerusalem, where she attended *shiurim* in increasing numbers, and she began to take on religious observance.

[9] Ruth is unusual in her situation as an unmarried single mother. Though most single mothers are Sephardi in Israel, the vast majority of these mothers were married before their pregnancy, and left by their husbands some time after having children within the marriage (Lavie 2018, 8). To learn more about Sephardi and Mizrahi single mothers in Israel, Haredi or otherwise, see Lavie 2018.

One night, in the middle of the night, her baby boy started coughing, choking, and struggling to breathe. Ruth took him to the hospital in Jerusalem, where he was diagnosed with laryngitis and asthma. Concerned for her child's health, Ruth returned to live with her mother, because the best children's hospital in the country, Schneider Children's Medical Center, is in Petach Tikvah. However, her son did not improve with the treatment that was given. Ruth took him to the hospital many times in the first year and a half of his life, and repeatedly told the doctors that she thought something else was wrong with him, something they were missing.

When her son was one and a half, he was admitted to hospital due to the severity of his illness. The doctors discovered upon this admission that he had cancer in his stomach. The cancer had been missed for nearly a year previous despite multiple hospital visits. A week and a half after he was admitted to hospital, Ruth's son died.

The period following her son's death was very bad for Ruth. She was deeply depressed, and fell into debt. She credits a close friend with saving her from this 'bad time;' this friend would force her to leave her bed and her house, and took her to religious *shiurim*. After about eight months, Ruth started to recover, but she still was in danger of being incarcerated for her debts. She took legal action against the hospital which had missed her son's diagnosis, and she became a surrogate for a friend who had fertility struggles. Between the surrogacy compensation and the lawsuit award, Ruth was able to fully pay off her debts. She married another *ba'al teshuvah*, and entered her religious life free of any encumbrances.

Ruth's story is tragic, and her resilience is admirable. However, her story is similar to many Israeli *ba'alos teshuvah* stories in the way she frames her life before and after becoming religious, and the process therein: before, she didn't know any better, but because she was taught about religion, she knows how to live a good life, following mitzvot, and it has saved her from the social and family dysfunctions of her pre-religious life. I found this

common among the three Israeli *ba'alos teshuvah* with whom I spoke. Religion saves one from the dangers and sins of a world without a moral compass.

'I look at the girls I was in the children's home with,' Shulamit tells me. She became religious in her teen years, and went directly into a *shidduch* upon leaving the home. 'Some of them are ok, but so many of them are screwed up bad [*sic*]! Some have terrible men, they are with the abuse. Some are even on drugs! Or they drink! *Chas v'shalom!* ['have mercy' or 'heaven forbid'] I am so thankful, *baruch Hashem*, that I became religious, that I was saved from everything. I married a good man, *baruch Hashem*, and we are safe, I am safe, my children are having such a good life, with both of us making them a home. One of the girls I was with, what do you call it? We slept in the same… yes! Dorm, this girl in my dorm, she had a little girl and now *that* girl is in a children's home… My children will have a better childhood than I had. That is what matters.'

Israeli *ba'alos teshuvah* view religion as saving them, both in the literal sense of providing security, structure, and family in a world that has largely been unkind to them, and in terms of saving them from transgressions and immoral behaviour. Ruth is Sephardi and Shulamit is Ashkenazi, which suggests that marginalisation is the common theme, rather than ethnic background; however, an argument could be made that certain ethnicities are more likely to face marginalisation in Israel than others. Israeli *ba'alos teshuvah* are more likely to present a narrative where religion is the 'right' and 'true path', which is likely influenced by easy linguistic access to religious texts like *Derech Eretz* and *Pirkei Avos*. Anglo *ba'alos teshuvah* access these texts later in their transformative processes through education (if at all); the Anglo attitudes and experiences show a more complex process of transformation which critiques the secular world from which they come, and allows more negotiation with the religious world that they choose to enter.

Anglo *Ba'alos Teshuvah* and Religion as Critique

Ba'alos Teshuvah who are so-called 'Anglo', broadly meaning that they speak English (though some who are considered 'Anglo' are possibly French-speaking Ashkenazim, or similarly 'Western'), generally come from more privileged backgrounds than their Israeli counterparts, though this is of course not without occasional exceptions. Most have grown up in suburbia or well-to-do urban households, have attended elite schools, and may or may not have had dysfunctional home lives. How and why they become religious often differs from their Israeli peers, and these reasons are important to understand when examining how they view their religious identity.

In general, most Anglo *ba'alos teshuvah* grew up with some nominal Jewish identity. If they were from the United States or Australia, they were more likely to have been Reform, Conservative, or not attended any synagogue as a child, whereas Canadians, South Africans, and British Jews were likely to have had more observant homes in their childhoods, mainly Masorti/Traditional, Conservadox, or even Modern Orthodox. Some may have had a *bat mitzvah*, some may have not; Americans were more likely to have attended public [state] school or a private, non-religious school, whereas the others were more varied in their educational backgrounds, including Jewish day schools which were not Haredi, and Christian parochial schools. Some grew up in homes with divorce, some did not; most had siblings, and all but one came from homes where there was an expectation to attend university. Most did attend at least some university; many graduated. Some have continued on with masters, doctorates, and other professional certifications. All became interested in a religious Jewish life after an encounter with a *kiruv* [outreach] organisation; some encountered those organisations in their home countries, often on their university campuses, while others encountered these organisations on a funded trip to Israel. Almost all pursued their interest in religious life by coming to Israel for full-time, long-term study in a seminary designed to

teach *ba'alos teshuvah*.

Miriam's story of becoming religious was typical of many. She was born in the greater Chicago area, the only daughter in a family of five. She says she always had a strong sense of her Jewish identity, even though she went to public school and had to fight to have a *bat mitzvah*.

'I wanted *kiddusha* [community],' she says, 'but I didn't know how to find it.'

She says that while she was in high school, she decided that she was a 'feminist atheist who wanted to be a "humanistic" rabbi. Can you believe that?' she laughed to me. 'What even is a rabbi without Hashem?'

She started college at Barnard College, Columbia University in autumn of 1997, and declared a double major in Africana Studies and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies by the end of her first year. She also became heavily involved in activist movements both on and off the campus, including a budding student-led branch of the Black Panthers. Early in the second semester of her sophomore year, a Black man named Amadou Diallo was murdered by police without cause.

'The campus, especially the Black Power groups, were up in arms, and there was a protest like every week,' she told me. 'I really felt this Jewish connection with the Black experience, I really empathised with the Black experience. I was even in this house that was a Jewish-African American dorm.'

She said she was at one protest that got particularly violent, and someone shouted at her that she should 'Go back to Westchester!' It really shook her up, because she saw how others must see her: as a privileged, entitled white girl. 'I thought to myself, "Who's got my back?"' Later that evening, when she was wearing her favourite jean jacket, of which she had sewn a giant Che Guevara face to the back, one of the Panthers glanced at it and then turned to her seriously and said, 'Go and learn about your own people. You have Jewish leaders for Jews,

and you should get to know them.'

His comment made a huge impression on her. She was in the process of deciding where to study abroad, and had been considering Tanzania or Edinburgh. 'In that moment, I decided to study abroad in Israel,' she told me, 'and I enrolled at Hebrew University.'

While at Hebrew University, she started attending the Beit Midrash, a campus program to teach non-religious students about religion, which several of my interlocutors had attended early in their transformative processes. Through this group, Miriam (which was not her name before she was religious) went on a *shabbaton* [a sabbath spent as a group with special programming, often in a special location] to Ascent, a centre for spiritual exploration and discovery, in the old city of Tsfat. There, she had her first exposure to Hasidic Judaism.

'The second I tasted it, I said, "I want more,"' Miriam tells me, her eyes alight. 'It had the depth that I was craving without the darkness that usually comes with the depth. This was depth, but it was *light* [sic] and uplifting.'

Halfway through her year abroad, Miriam left Hebrew University and started studying at Neve, a seminary program for *ba'alos teshuvah* in Jerusalem. She also met the man who was to become her husband, and they made a commitment to each other, and to traditional Judaism. Once they were back in the States, they were married in Miami, where his family was from, and she finished her college degree at the University of Maryland, where he was also studying. They both then moved to Israel, and her husband studied at Ohr Sameach, a *yeshiva* with a program for *ba'alei teshuvah*. Miriam studied at Neve until their first child was born.

Chana's story was similar to Miriam's: she also attended the Beit Midrash program at Hebrew University. However, she was at Hebrew University as a gap year before she started college. Her parents had sent her to Israel 'to get it out of her system'; her father had said that at least it was cheaper than paying for college in the United States. Chana had not always

been attracted to Judaism, however: her passion had been ignited by a six week Israel trip with a Conservative Jewish summer program between her junior and senior years of high school, in the late '80s.

'I so didn't want to spend six weeks with a bunch of Jews,' she told me, but said her cousins, who had completed the program in previous years, had convinced her to go. 'I came from a strong Jewish home, and I was always excited about being Jewish. It's just that certain things felt… *goyish*.' She used the Yiddish term for something that is non-Jewish. 'But then we had this amazing experience at the Diaspora Museum [Museum of the Jewish People at Beit Hatfusot] and the *madricha* [youth counsellor] made me realise that in order to *preserve* Judaism, I had to *observe* Judaism [sic].'

In her senior year of high school, she started attending synagogue every week, and would drive— she rolls her eyes at her own ignorance— to the services blasting klezmer music out her windows through her southern California town. When it came time to apply for college, she found none of the options appealed to her. She only wanted to go back to Israel. And so her father sent her to Hebrew University, and she started attending classes at the Beit Midrash program.

'I fell in love with Torah,' she said, 'I would leave on such a high.'

Like Miriam, she went on *shabbaton* to Tsfat, to Machon Alte, the Chabad Lubavitch seminary, instead of to Ascent as in Miriam's case, and decided to make a deep commitment to living a religious Jewish life. She returned to Jerusalem, and transferred out of Hebrew University and enrolled in Neve, like Miriam, but almost ten years before Miriam was a student there.

'I returned to California, and I had a really difficult conversation with my parents,' she said. 'I told them I wasn't going to go to college. And I went back to Neve to study more. My parents weren't pleased. I think my parents thought I would come running home after a year

or two. But after Neve, I went back to the States, to Monsey [New York], and I was studying at the Jewish Renaissance Center there when I met my husband. The *shadchan* [matchmaker] saw both of us each in Purim *shpiels* [plays]. We got married, and six weeks later we moved to Eretz Yisrael.'

Originally, they intended to stay for a year, but after seven years of visa extensions, Chana said they finally realised they were never leaving. Her husband started following the Biala rebbe, and they had nine children. Their children attended Yiddish-speaking schools, and integrated into the Chasidic world completely; all are now married with their own children, bar the youngest daughter, who has serious medical problems. This has caused Chana and her husband to move to Jerusalem with her, so that they can access the necessary medical care. The rest of Chana's children live in Bnei Brak, and she is unhappy living so far from them.

Menucha is slightly younger than Miriam and Chana; she was born in 1989 in the Boston area. She never attended any Hebrew school or synagogue while growing up; her mom, who is her Jewish parent, sometimes made a Passover *seder* and *latkes* on Chanukah, but nothing was regular and consistent.

'Judaism just wasn't a priority for my family,' she says. 'It wasn't like a major part of our identity. I mean, yes, my parents were busy, but it wasn't really that they were too busy to do anything, it just wasn't a priority.'

Menucha started college at the University of Pennsylvania in 2007, and stumbled upon a programme called Me'or. This is a *kiruv* program where emissaries [the name for observant Jews who move to less-observant areas in order to help and teach Jews] hold classes on Judaism and teach religious texts. The Me'or website advertises, 'Inspiring, educating, and empowering a new generation,'(*Meor* 2016) and lists twenty-one campus locations across America where they work, including a Manhattan programme which serves multiple

universities.

‘Me’or was amazing, it was like it opened me up to this whole new world, and I couldn’t stop learning,’ Menucha tells me. She went to Israel on a summer program with other Me’or students, and when she came back she decided to start taking on more Jewish observance.

‘I started only eating in the Kosher cafeteria, and I went to Chabad every Friday night,’ she says, ‘and then I added Saturday lunches, too.’

The next summer Menucha returned to study at a seminary. ‘I tried Pardes [a Modern Orthodox co-educational Beit Midrash], but it was too Modern. So the second half of the summer I studied at Midreshet Rachel v’Chaya.’ Midreshet Rachel v’Chaya, often referred to as ‘MRC’, is another seminary for *ba’alos teshuvah*. It is known for its rigorous academics, focussing on a wide range of texts and Jewish ideas. ‘I really liked MRC, but it almost felt too masculine. Like, I liked the learning, but I wanted to feel more in touch with my femininity.’

Menucha finished her studies at Penn, saying she struggled because by her final year she wanted to live in single-gender, Jewishly observant housing, and she was much more observant than the majority of her peers. She used her summers to travel to Israel and study. ‘I tried Mayanot, too,’ she said, referring to the seminary program run by Chabad Lubavitch in Jerusalem. ‘But Chabad just wasn’t my cup of tea.’

After completing undergraduate studies, Menucha made *aliyah*, and enrolled full time at Shearim, yet another seminary for *ba’alos teshuvah*. ‘Shearim was a really good fit,’ she told me. ‘I felt like I was a woman there.’

Menucha eventually met her husband, a *ba’al teshuvah*, through a *shadchan*; he studies with the Hornisteipoler Rebbe, and they send their children to a mixed Hasidic *cheider*. ‘In the end, Hasidic life spoke to us more than other versions of Judaism,’ Menucha tells me.

Though Menucha, Chana, and Miriam are each representative of a different decade of

ba'alos teshuvah, their stories have much in common. The unifying elements are: first, their encounter with some sort of *kiruv* organisation, be it the Hebrew University Beit Midrash or Me'or; second, their attendance at a seminary for *ba'alos teshuvah*. The *kiruv* programme ignites the interest; the seminary solidifies the commitment.

Kiruv programmes take two different types of approaches. Some focus on food, hospitality, and chaplaincy, offering a nurturing, home-like environment which students crave when they are away from home. Others offer learning, with discreet tastes of Jewish wisdom. This latter type seems to be the most influential in the lives of the Anglo *ba'alos teshuvah* with whom I conducted research. These *kiruv* programs, of which there are a plurality throughout the English-speaking world, are usually co-educational, and focus on a single topic each term. Once students are involved in these *kiruv* programs, those who are most interested in deepening their Jewish studies are encouraged to go to Israel on a study programme, either with one of the seminaries or *yeshivas*, or with a *Taglit*-Birthright associated organisation. Those who become *ba'alei teshuvah* usually return to Israel to study for a year or more in a seminary (for women) or *yeshiva* (for men). Some of these seminaries are incredibly academically rigorous in their religious course offerings, in order to meet the needs of the highly educated women who come to them.

Not everyone who becomes a *ba'alas teshuvah* is brought to religious life through *kiruv*; some are drawn more to the land of Israel itself, or find themselves in Israel and discover religious observance serendipitously.

Sitta grew up in a very Zionist, Israel focussed home in Galveston, Texas. Though the family was not at all religious, she always felt a strong sense of Jewish identity with Israel. After she finished high school, she went to Israel with the scouting programme *Chetz v'Keshet*, a program that offers both rugged outdoors tourism, and a taste of service in the IDF. She fell passionately in love with the land itself, and declared to her parents that instead

of going to university she wanted to serve in the Israeli army. They flatly refused her request, and told her if she still wanted to after she got her degree, she was welcome to return in four years. At the end of the summer she returned to the United States, and began her degree at SUNY Potsdam.

'I hated the snow,' Sitta told me ruefully. 'Every summer I went back to Israel, doing whatever I could to spend the most time in the land. I feel such a connection to the *place*. It's hard to describe.'

One summer, Sitta decided to spend a few days in Jerusalem before she went north to work on a kibbutz. A student on a budget, she chose to stay at Heritage House in the Old City, a hostel-like establishment that offers free or low-cost gender-separate dormitory housing to anyone Jewish. While there, the director of the women's House asked her why she came to Israel and what she planned.

'She said, "You didn't come here to pick lettuce," and she was right,' said Sitta. 'I guess I was also open to thinking a little bit about religion. I was reading *The Year of Living Biblically* [(Jacobs 2007)], and it was making me think about the connection between the religion and the land. I wasn't really thinking about becoming religious, I just was interested.' Upon her urging, Sitta cancelled her kibbutz plans and signed up for Livnot, a Tsfat-based programme that combines hiking and outdoor activities with informal Jewish mystical education. While she was attending Livnot, Sitta met and fell in love with the man who would become her husband. They dated for several more years; he gradually became more religious, while she found herself unable to commit. All she knew for sure was that she wanted to live in Israel.

At the end of her undergraduate degree, Sitta made *aliyah* to Israel. She was faced with a choice: become religious and marry the man she loved, or break up with him.

'Basically,' she said, 'I *frummed* up for my husband.'

When she speaks of this, Sitta almost removes her own agency from the process. Nevertheless, she allows herself to acknowledge that she is content in her choice.

'I felt like it just sort of happened to me,' she said. 'Like, I was single and doing yoga in Sacher Park one moment and then the next I was married and had a baby. But then this one day, I was pushing the stroller up the hill in Har Nof, and you know— that's a *huge* [sic] hill— and suddenly I realised I was *happy.* Like, really happy. I had this wonderful, beautiful family, and this community, and I was *happy.*'

Within each of these stories, a critique of secular society begins to emerge. Sitta wasn't *unhappy* before she became religious; none of the other women articulated any misery about their childhoods or family situations, either. However, by choosing religious life, they have all found contentment and fulfilment through choosing traditional female roles, within a patriarchal religious society. Rather than assuming these women are rejecting liberal-progressive ideologies of gender equality— indeed, as discussed in further chapters, they are not— we must instead understand these choices to be a form of critique of the secular mainstream culture in which they were raised. Whereas Israeli women who are *ba'alos teshuvah* are motivated by the stability and security offered by the religious community, Anglo *ba'alos teshuvah* are attracted to the paradigm shift that religious life offers. In our knitting metaphor of critique, they are unpicking the inner scarves of their secular identities, and re-knitting themselves with some threads of the old, and other new yarns of religious life.

Singer-songwriter Lizzi Serling's music is rife with critiques of the mainstream secular, especially in terms of the status and value of women. Lizzi is a *ba'alas teshuvah*, originally from California, who has formed the band Be'er Mayim Chaim ('The Well of the Water of Life') with two other *ba'alos teshuvah*, one of whom plays violin, the other cello. She plays guitar and is the lead singer, with the other two women as backup voices. Their music draws on a number of influences, including American folk, Bluegrass, Celtic Traditional, and

Country Western. They hold concerts for women, and Lizzi offers voice lessons and directs a choir, which sometimes performs with the band. One of Lizzi's most popular songs, 'Enough', is a critique of secular values and ideals around femininity, and an affirmation of the life and choices of religious Jewish women.

'Enough'[10]
Lizzi Serling

What if, what if women were enough?
What if, what if I don't need the love
of an audience of men to know that my art's relevant
I'm doing fine
I'm enough

And what if, I'm not worried about my size?
And what if, I don't need to scrutinize
if my belly's round or flat, if I'm skinny or I'm fat
I'm doing fine

When I chose to live this way,
you know I made the choice to say,
I know it: I'm enough

'Cause there is more to life than fame,
and I am more than just my name,
I'll say it: I'm enough

We're on a journey with our bodies and our minds
To know we're doing what we can with our time
Don't want to look back one day and say
I wasted life away searching for some empty prize
or feeding into culture's lies
I'm enough

What if, I'm not trying to get rich?
And what if, I just want to show my kids
That I'll give them what they need and the rest is luxury
We're doing fine

When I chose to live this way, you know
I made the choice to say,

[10] All lyrics by Lizzi Serling used with the composer's permission.

I know it: I’m enough

’Cause there is more to life than fame,
and I am more than just my name,
I'll say it: I’m enough

We're on a journey with our bodies and our minds
To know we're doing what we can with our time
Don't want to look back one day and say
I wasted life away searching for some empty prize
or feeding into culture's lies
I'm enough

I'm enough (No matter what I weigh)

I'm enough (No matter what they say)

I'm enough (No matter what I make)

I'm enough

I'm enough

I'm enough

I'm enough

I'm enough, and I've…

Had enough (of body shaming)
Had enough (of victim blaming)
Had enough
Had enough

What if…
What if women are enough?

‘Enough’ exalts in the forms of womanhood discussed in Chapter Three, and critiques the various ways in which secular society is in opposition to Jewish values. ‘What if I don't need the love of an audience of men to know that my art's relevant, I’m doing fine, I’m enough,’ is a celebration of the prohibition of *kol isha*, under which women do not sing in front of men; not only is *kol isha* celebrated, but Lizzi suggests that the ‘need’ to sing in front of men is a

commentary on one's insecurity and lack of confidence. She has unpicked the thread of her secular childhood spent on the stage. Her repetition of 'I'm enough' constantly recentres the derivation of value within the self, and a rejection of external validation.

The second verse critiques the superficiality of secular life, with 'And what if, I'm not worried about my size? And what if, I don't need to scrutinize if my belly's round or flat, if I'm skinny or I'm fat, I'm doing fine.' This suggests that the secular culture of focus on body shape, of fat-shaming, and size-obsessed culture is mediated by religious life; religious life values women for their internal personhood rather than superficially judging them for their weight or shape. She similarly condemns the secular pursuit of riches and fame, suggesting that religious life offers women the chance to feel completely valued and fulfilled; to feel they are 'enough.'

In many ways, Lizzi's and other women's choices to become *ba'alei teshuvah* are no different than women of earlier generations who chose to join communes, or other parts of the counterculture, choosing to stop shaving or marrying, and sometimes even eschewed clothes (Gerhard 2010, 112-115). Lizzi and many of her ilk are seeking a paradigm shift, a change in value systems and social context. Kaufman's work (1993) also found women became *ba'alos teshuvah* because they were looking for a new value system; however, she suggests they are 'post-feminist' (Kaufman 1993, 10) and that clearly does not hold for the majority of the *ba'alos teshuvah* I encountered, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Lizzi's critiques of secular life are, inevitably, influenced by her life experiences, and her journey is somewhat remarkable in that she made the transition relatively quickly, and at a younger age than many North American *ba'alei teshuvah*. Her childhood was full of the pressure of fame: by the time she was four years old, she had her own agent, and she spent her childhood acting on television and in professional stage shows. Her homelife was unstable; her father struggled with addiction and her mother had a poorly managed mental

illness. Lizzi still struggles to find the balance of maintaining a relationship with them, while keeping a healthy distance.

She had no exposure to Orthodox Judaism growing up, with only a nominal bat mitzvah ceremony in a Reform synagogue. She was not looking for religious learning or growth in Israel, but was signed up through local Jewish community networks to have an interview for a Birthright-*Taglit* trip after she turned eighteen. She had just suffered a bitter disappointment when the call for her Birthright interview came: though she had been promised the lead in the workshop of Coraline opening in San Francisco, the part was given to someone else. When the interviewer called, it seemed like the perfect time to take a ten day trip to Israel.

Her programme was Israel Free Spirit, run by the Orthodox Union, and though it is more religious than other Birthright programmes, it doesn't generally operate as a *kiruv* programme. However, it gave Lizzi a glimpse into observance, and she wanted more. She chose to extend her stay in Israel with the Jewel programme, a women's introduction to Jewish learning, and from there she transferred directly to Neve, where she studied for two years. She only went back to California once, at the end of her first year in Neve in 2013, for two weeks, to collect her personal belongings and make her *aliyah* formal. She has only visited home once more in the last seven years.

'I chose this because I am trying to live a truthful life,' Lizzi says. 'There's a unique potential over here, in Eretz Yisrael. Women really do support each other. It's kind.'

Though Lizzi's story is more unusual than Menucha's, Sitta's, Chana's, or Miriam's, all women share their choice to become Haredi, and a critical view of the secular culture and society from which they came. Their choices are direct critiques of that society, and especially of the position of women within secular society. These are critiques, rather than simply criticisms, because they carry certain values with them, and retain secular sensibilities surrounding certain values and knowledge, as discussed below and in Chapter Five. But they

haven't *burnt* their internal scarves of secular identity; they have unravelled certain rows and re-knitted them, with new yarn from the scarf of Haredi identity, forming something changed but not completely new. Religious Jewish life offers them a different value system, one that honours women for being ethically religious, wives and mothers, and celebrates their traditional role.

Soccer Moms in Sheitels

Anglo *ba'alos teshuvah* embrace their new lives as a religious choice; however, certain other values, which have no apparent religious importance, are more slow to change. Culture can be difficult to change, and while certain Israeli cultural inevitabilities are embraced— the *balagan* [chaotic mess] that is driving, the insanity of government bureaucracy (Dalsheim 2019, Lavie 2018)— many *ba'alei teshuvah* have certain expectations for their lives, and their children's lives, which are remnants of their middle-class, suburban upbringings. This especially applies to their attitudes around after-school enrichment activities and sport; it also applies to the pervasive culture of the home and beliefs about childhood.

Recently, Amazon.com has started delivering, via their American site, to Israel. This new access to American consumer goods emerged part way through my fieldwork; for the Anglo *ba'alos teshuvah* and *frum* from birth women, it was all anyone wanted to talk about for about a month. In Israel, it is fairly easy to get certain American goods, especially in terms of more expensive items and clothes lines that are available at the big malls in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, but women were excessively excited about small convenience items that they had been missing, sometimes for decades.

'I can't believe I am getting *zip lock bags* [sic] tomorrow from Amazon!' Menucha told me one day. 'I am sending my son to *cheider* [Hasidic primary school for boys] Sunday with bamba in a *zip lock bag*. I only bought one box, that's plenty. I can wash them. It feels like such a gift from *Hashem*.'

In this moment, it is clear how *ba'alos teshuvah* knit together Haredi values with North American middle-class suburban secular culture. Menucha wants to be a mom like her peers in the Greater Boston Area who pack their children balanced lunches to take to school, and pick them up in minivans to bring them to their after-school activities like dance and baseball; she also attributes all things gained through *parnassah* [livelihood or economic survival] to God, and behaves in a frugal, grateful way towards her material goods, in an attempt to minimise her consumerist tendencies.

So great was the hubbub around Amazon coming to Israel, that Lizzi Serling was inspired to write a song about the tensions of *ba'alos teshuvah*'s consumerism and their new lives of faith and meaning, if also of occasional deprivation.

Long Way Home
Lizzi Serling

It's a long way home, it's a long way home
It's a long way home to the place where I was born and raised

And it's a long flight gone, it's a long flight gone
Oh, it's a long flight gone to the place where I was born and raised

Little package on a ship, moving 'cross the ocean
Little relics of a life, my shallow devotion
Little package on a ship won't you bring me some emotion
Like a dove that's so far flown
'Cause it's a long way home

There's a flood on the town, and there is mud on the ground
And I am never coming down to the place where I was born and raised

Lizzi's song both pokes fun at the Amazon purchases she and other women are making, and yet also acknowledges that these things are bringing them 'relics of a life' that they have left behind. It is a condemnation of secular life, as in her song 'Enough,' which is 'shallow,' and she associates home and the life she's left behind with 'mud' and 'coming down', an English translation for the Hebrew word that is used for Jews leaving Israel, the opposite of

making *aliyah*, which literally means 'going up.' And yet, through this small consumerist weakness, she is allowing *ba'alos teshuvah* to recognise it will bring them 'some emotion,' while elevating them as 'doves' who have 'flown so far,' and re-establishing their commitment to religious life: 'I am never coming down to the place where I was born and raised.'

Ba'alos teshuvah believe that certain aspects of their secular lives were worthwhile and of value; they bring these aspects to the Haredi world and introduce new ideas and forms of Haredi personhood, which are generally accepted and sometimes fully embraced by the Haredi mainstream. This is a duplication of the knitting process in which all Haredi women participate. One of these things is after-school enrichment, including sports and arts programmes.

'Enrichment is really new to the Haredi world,' Tovah tells me. She is a *ba'alas teshuvah* from Toronto. 'Like, there's nothing for kids to do from like 4pm [sic] to bedtime. Especially the girls. And I firmly believe that my children are *children*, they should have *childhoods* [sic]. We don't have television, and reading options are really limited, so what are they going to do? I'm so happy they have dance and gymnastics and drama now.'

Tovah's comment reveals both an investment in a suburban middle-class enrichment attitude, and a subtle condemnation of *frum* culture; she wants her children to have a childhood, meaning that she doesn't want to turn her older children into babysitters and housekeepers, which she and I discussed at length. She understands why traditional religious households enlist help from older siblings, and give teenage girls greater responsibility, but she cannot shake the suburban middle-class values with which she was raised.

'If my daughter wants to help me cook for *shabbos*, and she often does, that's fine,' Tovah explains. 'She'll usually make a dessert or something, and she likes doing that. But I never ask her to help beyond setting the table or something.'

This suggests a perceived cultural difference between *ba'alei teshuvah* houses and *frum* from birth houses, in which children who are raised by *frum* from birth parents might have more expectations put upon them, and fewer opportunities for fun. While I would suggest that expectations of children varied by household in my research, and were equally variable in *frum* from birth houses as in *ba'alei teshuvah* homes, the novelty of 'fun' was a much-discussed topic.

'Fun is a new thing in the religious world,' Sarah told me. 'No one necessarily thinks it's bad, it's just *new*. The idea that you can go out with your friends, and see a Regal show, and leave the kids with Tatti [Dad in Yiddish] for the evening, that's really novel. But people are getting used to it and it's becoming more normal.'

Regal produces massive, professional West End type musicals in a by-women-for-women setting in Beit Shemesh. Sarah is *frum* from birth; she has always been involved in theatre and the arts. Her *Beis Yaakov* school[11] where she grew up in New York put on yearly musical productions, and she has been involved in the performing arts in Israel since she came to Jerusalem at age eighteen for seminary. She has performed in plays with Esther Goldman, the Women's Performance Community of Jerusalem, the Modi'in group Women in Theater, Regal Productions, and is a member of a Playback Theater troupe.

Esther had similar opportunities as Sarah in school growing up in Queens, but acknowledges how the *ba'alei teshuvah* have contributed to the growth of the arts in the Haredi world. These contributions are not simply limited to Anglo *ba'alei teshuvah*, either; the renowned Israeli Rama Burshtein, director of *Fill the Void*, is a *ba'alas teshuvah* with secular film school training from her pre-religious life (Skinazi 2018, 189-192). Ruth Colian is a songwriter. A high proportion of *ba'alos teshuvah* seem to have artistic talent and skill.

Many *ba'alos teshuvah* have therefore started after-school enrichment programmes in

[11] See Seidman 2019.

whichever artistic field they have expertise. This serves to fill the demand for enrichment while also providing modest income. These *chugim* [electives] charge modest fees which are accessible to much of the Haredi world, and generally also offer scholarships for children from less economically secure families. Rachel Factor and Lexie Koh teach dance to over one hundred women and girls, Lizzi directs a choir and has a waitlist for her voice lessons, Kerry Bar-Cohn teaches tap and drama, and many others teach various instruments, and so on.

These programmes have, by and large, been enthusiastically embraced by the Haredi community at large. Rachel and Lexie teach in one of the most respected *Beis Yaakov*s. The children are from a range of backgrounds, including the children of both *ba'alei teshuvah* and *frum* from birth parents; Chasidic, Litvish, and Sephardi families are enrolled in their dance classes.

One of their dancers, Chavi, spoke with me about her choice to dance with Rachel and Lexie, and now help teach. 'I started dancing in eighth grade,' she tells me quietly. 'I missed out doing dance in ninth grade because I wanted to do drums. But I liked dance more and so I went back to it in tenth grade and got more serious. I wanted a *chug*, something to do in the afternoons. That was all at first, but then after, it got more serious.'

Chavi is the youngest of twelve children in a Litvish family from Unsdorf. For school, she attended the prestigious *Beis Yaakov* in Mattersdorf. She studies in the Ma'alot *Beis Yaakov* Seminary; this is one of the many post-high school seminary programmes based on the *Beis Yaakov* system which has been created for Haredi young women in Jerusalem, and elsewhere in Israel. She is looking for a *shidduch*, and assisting Rachel and Lexie at the dance school. Her parents were born in Monsey, one of the religious Jewish communities in upstate New York. She was born in Jerusalem. For Chavi, dance has been a welcome distraction from the pressures of school, while also helping her to realise other goals.

'I love to dance, it takes the pressure off from school,' she tells me. 'We have a lot of

tests. It's kind of like to *daven*, when I'm dancing. We have a dance about, like, a wedding. Like under the *chuppah* [wedding canopy]. I like that one.'

This very secular form of dance, in a secular after-school enrichment model, is transformed into a religious experience of prayer and a promotion of Haredi womanhood; this makes it permissible for the Haredi world, and relevant to girls like Chavi. Chavi comes from one of the most strictly religious Litvish backgrounds; while there are many Gurer Hasidim involved in the performing arts, it hasn't made as many inroads in other Hasidic communities.

At the *melave malka* for Ateres Kallah, a wide range of performances are offered while the audience awaits Rabbanit Mizrahi's arrival. Lizzi Serling sings religious songs, not her own compositions. There are many Belz women there, and it's a very Hasidic audience. Chayele Regal, of Regal Productions, a major producer of Haredi women's musical theatre in Beit Shemesh, is the Master of Ceremonies; she calls forward two young girls to do some gymnastic tumbling for the audience. These girls will be performing in the upcoming Regal musical. They are impressively nimble, and the audience is appreciative. One of them sings a little and says a few lines from the play. Then she explains to the attentive audience how much she loves doing the play, and how it helps her be better in school, because she has to finish all her homework before rehearsal. This is clearly encouraging for some women in the audience, who busily start chattering after the girls step down. Not only has the Haredi world accepted enrichment and fun, even the most stringent sectors are beginning to embrace these new options for children. This is all a result of women's agency, knitting together the secular values of enrichment with the religious world's ethics.

There are, however, markedly fewer options available for boys. It is more difficult to change attitudes surrounding boys' education, where Torah learning has taken such primacy, and any enrichment activity is seen as stealing time that could be used for learning. Sport has

had more success than art in the Haredi world for boys; physical activity is viewed as preferred because it helps boys release their excess energy so that they can concentrate on their studies. It is something that weighs on the minds of many of the mothers I interviewed, both *ba'alos teshuvah* and *frum* from birth, who have sons who may not be suited to study in the long run.

External Influences: Housing and Secular Education

There are also external pressures that are influencing change in the Haredi world in Israel. The housing market is in crisis; there is too little land approved for building in the most densely populated central region of the country, and therefore what housing exists is subject to extortionate market inflation. This disproportionally affects the Haredi community, which has the highest fertility rate of any sector of the population. As a result, Haredim are seeking housing in areas which are not customarily Haredi neighbourhoods; in some places, these moves are changing the character of non-Haredi areas to be more Haredi, but in other places, Haredim are living among other types of Jews. This has led to higher exposure to other ways of being observant Jews, and has broken down some of the Haredi identity which was developed in opposition to a Jewish 'other.' Certain activities, especially within the by-women-for-women arts world, have also contributed to this. Furthermore, the ministry of education has opened several 'Haredi campuses' of major universities in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak, and so secular education is generally on the rise for both men and women in the Haredi world. All of these various influences are contributing to the creation of the 'New Haredim', which is essentially a new Haredi middle-class. This middle-class is not excluded from mainstream Haredi society; rather, it is embraced by the Haredi mainstream who rely on these educated, relatively affluent Haredim for both monetary and social support, through the provision of secular support such as counselling, accounting, and medical care.

Increasing Stringency and Improved Women's Education: A Volatile Mix

To counter the losses in earnings from men due to their increased preoccupation in the *yeshiva*, Haredi female employment had increased significantly by the aughts, as had the number of women earning higher degrees (Regev 2013, figure 5). Future career plans continue to be an important feature of young women's marriage match profiles, and having a career is becoming more broadly a part of the ideal pious woman (Avishai 2008, 419). However, women are still expected to only pursue certain types of degrees, in certain ways.

Michal was raised with an expectation from her parents that she would attend university, but her parents did not realise how limiting the *Beis Yaakov* curriculum had become in the latter half of the twentieth century.

'When I did very well on my exams in school, the head sat down with me and said, "Look, you're smart, so you should do what this other girl did and do a CPA course." But I wasn't really into that,' she tells me. She wanted to be a politician, or a veterinarian. A few years later, she signed up for the first class of women in the pilot Haredi women's campus of Machon Lev in Jerusalem, and earned a degree in computer science. In addition to programs like Machon Lev, the Open University also created more opportunities for Haredi women to earn degrees on their schedule, at home.

'The Open University became the university of Haredi people,' Esti Shushan tells me. 'Because for them, it's like… it's special, for them. Because they are married, they are working, they don't have time, and they *want* [sic] education.'

By 2013, 15% of Haredi women had higher degrees, whereas only 11% of Haredi men had academic degrees (Regev 2013, figures 2 & 3), and more than 60% of all Haredi women aged twenty-five to sixty-four were working outside the home (Ibid.). Only just under 38% of Haredi men of the same age were employed (Ibid.). Even those women without higher degrees had received far better secular education than their husbands, many of whom had not

even earned a *bagrut*. However, men are supposed to be the leaders of Haredi households in all things, religious and otherwise.

Haredi women's earning capacities were hampered by a severe gender wage gap which has affected all women in Israel; it continues to be one of the grossest gender wage gaps in the OECD (Weiss 2019). In 2008, the employment situation in the Haredi sector was as illustrated:

Haredim aged 25-64		
Demographic	Employment Rate	Monthly Salary Avg
Men w/o Academic Degree (~89% of men)	30%	NIS 7,580
Men w/ Academic Degree (~11% of men)	71%	NIS 13,565
Women w/o Academic Degree (~85% of women)	50%	NIS 5,236
Women w/ Academic Degree (~15% of women)	76%	NIS 8,970

(data drawn from Regev 2013, figures 2 & 3)

As the table shows, while 76% of women with academic degrees were employed, their earning capacity was still almost five thousand shekels a month less than a man with a degree; the majority of women did not have a degree, and therefore had the lowest earning capacity of any Jews in the nation, and yet were the main source of income for their family, which could easily be as large as ten people, often more. It should be noted that the communities with the largest educated gender wage gaps were Bnei Brak and Beit Shemesh; these were also the Haredi communities with the largest average number of children per family (Regev 2013, Appendices). The strain of religious stringency was beginning to show.

Haredi Campuses

On a cold, rainy night in February, I met Bina at the Waffle Bar in Ramat Eshkol, Jerusalem. She and I had been conversing for months, and my notes were checkered with interruptions from a hard winter: a baby with a fever, a son who needs picking up because it's

too rainy for him to walk home. We were looking forward to finally having almost a full hour to chat. Bina works full time at a non-profit organisation that focuses on Jewish unity through the cooperation of multiple non-profit organisations. The change is recent; she used to work behind the scenes for Shas, and sometimes for United Torah Judaism, and has enormous insight into Haredi politics. She's happy she left politics in favour of a non-profit; she says she has shifted to working outside the political system because she was starting to feel ineffective. Now, when she talks about her work bringing the *chesed* ['kindness, caring, compassion', used for charity; either charity organisations or charitable activities] work of so many Jews together, her face lights up.

I had been thinking a lot about the changes I've been seeing in higher education, so once we are settled, I ask her about them.

'It all comes to a head in marriage,' she says.

As women gained more secular education, there started to be a crisis in the home. A man, who was used to being the authority on Torah matters, would come home to his new wife and she would correct his math. 'It was hard for him. So this increase in women's secular education created friction.'

This friction has widely been referred to as the 'newly-wed crisis.' *Kallah* teachers throughout the Chasidic communities with whom I worked were preoccupied by this new conflicted state of just-marrieds in their communities, and spoke with me about it at length. Many rabbis have now mandated that husbands and wives continue attending classes with their *kallah* and *chasan* [groom] teachers through the first year of marriage, because of the issues arising from these new marital crises. But rather than condemning it, the *kallah* teachers suggested it was acceptable change.

'It must be *Hashem*'s will,' Freidy, a *kallah* teacher in the Boyaner Hasidic community, explained, when I asked. She could have condemned it as part of the incursion of modernity,

but she believed that it was part of what God wanted for her community; it was acceptable. This represents a stark change from things just a few years previous, when Stadler was studying the same crisis as it was arising.

In 2009, Nurit Stadler published *Yeshiva Fundamentalism: Piety, Gender, and Resistance in the Ultra-Orthodox World*. Her fieldwork had been conducted throughout the first decade of this millennium with Haredi men in Israel. She painted a picture of a community at the cusp of an internal crisis; men were simultaneously stifled by their *yeshiva* learning and frustrated by the burdens placed on their wives (Stadler 2009, 117). Some rabbinical leaders were not unsympathetic to the situation, and some social change did start to be introduced; rather than changing the educational or economic structure, however, these changes came in the form of addressing the mental and emotional stress of poverty and over-burdened wives. This does, however, show a change in perception of psychology and mental health, and the pamphlets given to *yeshiva* scholars evidence awareness of new-age self-help literature (Ibid., 32-33). These booklets encouraged men to spend more time with their wives, and redefined *yeshiva* masculinity and fatherhood to include a 'more emotionally involved relationship with the children, the family, and the community' (Ibid., 33). Stadler focussed on shifting types of masculine piety and the effect which these things were beginning to have on the relationship between husband and wife; meanwhile, the changes in female forms of Haredi piety were also taking place and further affecting life in the home.

Now, however, there have been direct pleas from the rabbinical leaders in the Haredi world for better secular educational opportunities for men, under circumstances which are acceptable for Haredi men to learn. This has led to the opening of Haredi campuses of many Israeli universities, usually located in Jerusalem or Bnei Brak, for men; these have male-only enrolment and instruction.[12] Furthermore, this represents a negotiation with the state goal of

[12] This has created issues in academia in Israel, because male instructors have more opportunities to

transforming Haredi men into productive, worker-citizens (Dalsheim 2019). While this seems to have restored some balance within the modern Haredi marriage, women are now feeling like they are losing out on certain opportunities they once had, Bina explains, because the government funding has been shifted towards men's programs and away from supporting Haredi women pursuing degrees. Statistics show that Haredi women and men are both continuing to earn higher degrees, however, and the number is increasing ('Statistical Report' 2018, 11).

Hashkafah and School Choice

There is increasing plurality of choice in educational options for boys today in the Haredi world, as a result of the increasing acceptance of secular education for boys. Bina, who is *frum* from birth and Litvish, acknowledges that girls' secular education is better over all, but she says she and her husband are concerned with their sons receiving both a good religious education, and a good secular education, especially since she believes one of her sons will not do so well 'sitting all day in a *yeshiva*.' They send their sons to a new school, one that maintains a high level of both tracks of education. *Yeshivat Divrei Yechezkel*, the school, is being used by the Ministry of Education as an example to model other hybrid *yeshiva* high schools for the nation, Bina tells me proudly. She describes the school as a hybrid Talmud-Torah and secular high school.

Tovah only has one son, who is her youngest; he has just started Talmud-Torah. She tells me she is worried about him in the Haredi school system in the long run.

'He has ants in his pants,' she says, also lamenting the limited options for sport available to him. 'He's not one to sit still.'

Her girls attend a *Beis Yaakov*, but an unusual *Beis Yaakov*, with a lot of secular and arts

instruct, and therefore earn more money. Women in academia are strongly critical of the imbalance created.

classes as part of the normal school day. She laughs. ‘The teachers at the school, they don’t view it as a normal school. They view it as like, *kiruv*.’ Still, she is happy with the education her daughters receive there.

Tzirele, a Boyan Hasidic woman, sends her children to a *Beis Yaakov* and a Hasidic *cheider*. Her oldest child has learning difficulties.

‘It was hard to sort out his school,’ she says. ‘He needed extra support and other stuff—lots of hands on, tactile learning. So he goes to this really special school in Har Nof, instead of the *cheider* near to us.’

She has struggled to find the right balance for her children, whom she characterises as shy. ‘I don’t want to go out of the Haredi school system, but I want more from the Haredi schools.’

Tzirele’s sentiments are likely representative of a growing attitude broadly in the Haredi community. Like Bina’s school, there are new schools opening across the country which are *hashkafically* Haredi, meaning their outlook, approach, and interpretation are Haredi, but which also balance secular study with religious study for boys. Girls’ education is not seeing as much choice arise as of yet; this is likely due to the previous increases in secular education in general in religious girls’ schools. However, I would expect to see some more school choice for Haredi girls appearing within the next decade, as parents become increasingly dissatisfied with the parochial approaches of *Beis Yaakov*, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Chava Ewa Darski Kovacs, a Haredi stand-up comedian, has a part of her routine that never fails to draw a big laugh, but also highlights the growing discontent with *Beis Yaakov*.

‘My youngest is a year and a half, and I get these little looks and questions, and I’m going to put it out there: People are wondering if I’m pregnant. People are wondering if yes, maybe, soon, is she trying… So I’ve decided I’m giving this answer:’

She pauses a beat.

With a beatific smile, glancing upward, she says, '*Baruch Hashem*, I'm due in eleven months. I'm really excited.'

The audience laughs.

'Ok, thank you for laughing. Thank you for laughing because it means you know a little bit about biology, and a little bit about math, and that's really commendable. I told a friend the same thing, and she just put a big smile on her face. She said, "*Baruch Hashem*," and she walked away. And I'm thinking, that's wonderful, but at the same time, this is why the *Beis Yaakov* education is not going to hold you for the rest of your life.'

The audience laughs hysterically.

When the school has become the butt of a communal joke, inevitably change will come.

Housing Crisis

The central area of Israel, between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and north along the coast from Tel Aviv, is where the majority of the country's population lives. It is an area of massively dense housing, in which people are squeezed to maximum capacity. Suburban towns boast high rise apartment buildings, because building up is the only way to gain more space. Jerusalem sits in a nook of the West Bank; the disputed territory balloons outward on either side of the city towards the coast, with the narrowest point between the separation barrier and the Mediterranean fewer than ten miles across. Much of the Haredi community lives in this central region as well; historically, Haredim in the central area have been concentrated within north Jerusalem neighbourhoods, Beit Shemesh, Bnei Brak, El'ad, and Ashdod. However, the Haredi birth rate remains the highest in the country, even as the Arab Israeli birth rate has dropped (Ibid.), and Haredi families are, on average, between eight and nine people per household. In certain parts of Haredi society, families can easily reach twelve

or fifteen people before the eldest children begin to marry and leave home; these family sizes are nuclear, and grandparents do not tend to live with their children and grandchildren. Housing is in extremely high demand for Haredim, and most Haredim need affordable housing with plenty of space.[13]

As a result, Haredim have moved to neighbourhoods and cities which were not traditionally Haredi in increasing numbers. Neighbourhoods in south Jerusalem, which were historically National Religious or even secular, now have the black hats of the Haredim among the knitted *kippot* [skull cap] at bus stops. Petach Tikvah, Rehovot, and Netanya are host to significant Haredi communities. Areas outside the central area have also become new Haredi strongholds; sometimes, to the exclusion of the people who lived there previously, which increases resentment of Haredim. This has occurred in places like Tiberias and Arad; Tsfat and Be'er Sheva have also hosted Haredi communities both historically and currently.

However, one significant option both in terms of space and affordability, which has become increasingly popular is the possibility of moving to the West Bank settlements. At the time of writing, approximately thirty percent of the Jews living in the West Bank are Haredi (Magid 2017). Some settlements, like Modi'in Illit, Beitar Illit, Emanuel, and Nahliel, are recognised centres for Haredi communities. They maintain a fairly even half and half split between Hasidim and Litvish. The Haredi move to the settlements represents the first time that the state has legitimised the self-segregation of the Haredi community and the high Haredi birth rate; this is only because in moving to the settlements, Haredim became a tool of the state expansion project (Cahaner 2017). This negotiation, and its impact on the Haredim, will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

One of the Hasidic groups which has largely moved outside of their former Jerusalem

[13] The housing crisis has also disproportionately affected Mizrahim (Lavie 2018, 11), and therefore I would assume that Mizrahi Haredim are doubly affected.

home of Mea Shearim is the Karlin-Stolin, whose rebbe has made his court in Givat Ze'ev, a 'settlement neighbourhood', so-called because it is a new-build, over the Green Line, and offers a suburban-like atmosphere, but it is on the Jerusalem side of the separation barrier. The Karliners with whom I spoke said that the rebbe made the decision to move his people to Givat Ze'ev because he wanted them to have a better quality of life.

'It's very overcrowded in Mea Shearim and Ge'ula,' Bubbie Brenner, a Karliner grandmother, told me. 'It's not so nice, the houses are old and you're right in next to each other. He wanted us to have space, and fresh air, and some peace and quiet. It's better for everyone.' Her husband is a former secretary to the rebbe, and they have a beautiful, spacious, airy flat with a garden terrace in the back, shaded during the day from the sun by a sheer cliff face, and in the evening you can smell jasmine. Her son's family have a flat in the next building over, on the top of the tower, with two terraces that look out across the Judean Hills, facing west. While spending a *shabbos* with them, Mrs Brenner indicated the moment we could see the sun slip below the horizon, the moment of *shkia* [sundown]. We spent much of *shabbos* looking out at the view, often foregoing talking, soaking in the silence.

'It's so peaceful here, and the air is so good,' Mrs Brenner affirmed.

Fresh air and freedom from overcrowding are often articulated as the reasons for moving to the West Bank.

'My husband and I made the decision [to move to the settlements] about two years ago and I have never been happier,' says Shaindel, a middle-aged woman. 'We have such beautiful air and freedom, it's the best thing we could have done. My husband still learns in Yerushalayim, we still use the community for schools and everything, but we live out and I love it. My children can be free.'

Shaindel is representative of a different type of Haredi settler: rather than moving to an established Haredi community settlement, she and her husband moved to a settlement which

is less established, and which has no other Haredim living within its community. The majority of her neighbours are ideological settlers, who moved to this place in the West Bank with the express goal of claiming more territory for the Jewish people, and who see living in the land as fundamentally connected to living a Jewish life. They are devoutly religious, but they are not Haredi; *hashkafically* their schools, synagogue, and outlook are entirely different. They would be understood to be either *Torahni* or Chardal, the latter of which I will use to avoid confusion with the Shas girls' school, though it has somewhat negative connotations, according to a woman who identified as *Torahni*. Chardal is a combination of the *Har* in Haredi, and the words *Dati Leumi*, which means National Religious. Chardal Jews are both extremely stringently religious, and extremely Zionist.

Shaindel, and others like her, maintain their Haredi identity by continuing to use community institutions in Jerusalem and elsewhere that are *hashkafically* Haredi, but live outside of the community in settlements with other kinds of Jews. Shaindel's choice to do so was not necessarily informed by the political context of the settlement which she chose, though Shaindel and her family have become somewhat politicised through their environment, which I will discuss further in Chapter 7. Instead, Shaindel, and most like her, shrug and tell me they were just looking for fresh air and a little independence.

'Borders don't mean much to *Hashem*,' Shaindel says, when I ask about her choice. 'International law, who cares? Torah matters, and Torah is what we are all living.'

The Karliners with whom I spoke had similar lack of concern for what they viewed as arbitrary and invisible impositions from the non-Jewish world. Yael's conversation, however, in the previous chapter, suggests that there is some political engagement, and that these non-Jewish arbitrations of law and border do hold relevancy for some. Ultimately, what matters to Jews who move 'out of town,' as they put it, is relief from the pressures and oppressiveness of living in the panopticon of the community.

‘People don’t thrive in a more close structured community, or I haven’t,’ says Lexie. She and her family live in a more Modern Orthodox neighbourhood in Jerusalem. ‘You’re at the mercy of the rav.’ Both Lexie and Esti Shushan are surprised when I discuss how many people have moved to settlements from the Haredi world.

‘Really?’ said Esti. ‘I don’t understand why they’re doing that. They don’t have to. They could move somewhere else up north or something. It’s dangerous.’

Bina agrees with Esti’s assessment of the danger of moving to the West Bank. ‘These people are taking a risk moving to the settlements,’ she tells me. ‘Their kids could get locked up by the authorities without any reason. If you move out there, you’re making a choice. You’re subject to the whims of a dictatorship, basically. All of the West Bank is under this one guy, who can say anything is a security risk and just take you from your house in the middle of the night.’ Her assessment is reminiscent of the complaints of the Palestinian people living in the same area. I am surprised, and I tell her so, because I thought that Jews were treated with more privilege in the West Bank. ‘There’s no rule of law,’ she declares.

Still, she says, she sees why it might be worth the risks. ‘It’s a different land authority under him,’ she clarifies, referring to the Israeli head of security in the West Bank. ‘So there are different laws, and it’s easier to build a place, have some grass and green space. Stuff like that. So for some, it’s worth it.’

Ultimately, the choice to move to the settlements is a lifestyle one, rather than a political one, for the majority of my interlocutors. For *ba’alei teshuvah*, it is also often part of their suburban middle class sensibility: they would like their children to grow up with a ‘back yard.’ The choice to leave the community, however, whether it be to the West Bank or to a less religious area in Israel, is bringing many more Haredim in contact with other types of religious Jews, both *Dati Leumi* and Chardal, and breaking down much of the alterity that was established over the first sixty years of living in the state of Israel. Certain activities are

becoming more broadly oriented towards religious people in general, as opposed to specifically Haredi participation.

One of these areas of commonality and overlap is within the by-women-for-women performing arts world. Many religious Jews, not just Haredim, are not comfortable with mixed performances, and thus performers from different religious backgrounds have started to mix within the women's-only arts space. The Women's Performance Community of Jerusalem is one of these mixed spaces, where Haredi women encounter women from other Jewish backgrounds. Sarah, the Litvish woman from Arzei Habira, has performed with them in their recent original musical, *Hidden: The Secret Jews of Spain*. She has struggled with aspects of mixing, but in general has enjoyed the exposure to other approaches.

'It's a real *nisayon* [struggle] for me to listen to women talk about performing with men,' she tells me, telling me about women's conversations concerning their other performance experiences. 'I just don't want to be associated with that. But it's so nice not being in an only Haredi play. I can breathe, I can feel free.'

Recently, there was a question of imposing *shomer negiah* upon a relationship portrayed in the play. *Shomer negiah* refers to the foregoing of physical touch between men and women who are not either married to each other or closely related. In the play, two characters (played by women, of course) are engaged to be married, but are not yet wed when they are told they have been discovered as Jews and must flee Spain. The character Sarah plays was directed to cling to her future husband in fear. If *shomer negiah* was imposed, the two would not be able to touch until the final scene of the play, under the *chuppah*.

'First of all,' Sarah says in irritation, 'it's not historically accurate because *shomer negiah* wasn't a thing in the seventeen hundreds in Spain. I mean, like, they wouldn't have known, and it didn't make them bad Jews for not knowing. But also, when I cling to him [the character played by a woman], it feels right and good and, like, natural. It's what I *want* to do

as a character in that moment. [Imposing *shomer negiah*] feels like *giving in* to the Haredi community. It's going back to *my* life and that's not fun.'

This reveals a great deal about Sarah's awareness of the changes in stringencies of modesty and gender separation over time, and her feeling of stifling oppression with the current situation. She does not find her life enjoyable. She enjoys escaping into a different part and a different life. She is exposed to other ways of being Jewish, and though parts of these things make her uncomfortable, she feels 'free' to 'breathe' and be 'natural' in the space outside the community. The same is happening when Haredim move to areas outside the community. They see that there are alternative ways to live as good Jews, and they embrace certain differences, while rejecting other things that conflict with Haredi *hashkafah*. Gradually, there is a blurring of lines, and there emerge increasingly complex ideas of what it means to be Haredi.

I ask Sarah if she would ever move to the Gush Etzion, a settlement block in the West Bank, where many of her co-stars live.

'I don't know,' she says. 'I used to think they weren't religious enough, but now I've realised a lot of them are really, really *frum*.'

Over time, as the Haredi population approaches fifteen, and then twenty, percent of the population of Israel by 2030 ('Statistical Report' 2018), increased contact and mixing will be inevitable, and this will naturally create more change and further complexities within Haredi identity in Israel.

The New Haredi Middle Class

All of the changes and influences on and in the Haredi world over the last ten years have led to a new type of class structure within Haredi society. Many of the changes discussed above have contributed to the creation of a new Haredi Middle Class, which is often called

the ‘New Haredim’. I will use the term Haredi Middle Class or New Haredi Middle Class to refer to the ‘New Haredim’ because I want to avoid confusion with *ba’alei teshuvah*, and because the ‘New Haredim’ are essentially ‘new’ because they are middle class. There is also a strong and enduring Haredi mainstream, and then a bottom sector of society which is neither middle class nor mainstream, and these are the struggling and marginalised segments of Haredi society.

Michal explained to me, sitting at her kitchen table, ‘The Haredi world is very divided as it is. One minute. No, you know the regular division into Hasids, and Litvish and Sephardic and all that, but the real division of the Haredi public—’ she grabbed my pen and notebook, and started drawing.

Haredi Socio-Economic Divisions		
Marginalised	**Mainstream**	**New Middle Class**
30%	40%	30%
Social drop-outs Israeli *ba’alei teshuvah* *Yeshiva* drop-outs Divorced people The very, very poor	Chasidic, Litvish, and Ashkenized Sephardi At least three generations religious Economically poor Conformists	High employment Not full-time *yeshiva* Attend university Economically stable Fewer children

Michal launches into explanations. ‘Like, there are a million Haredim in Israel. Something like 40%, let's say, that's the mainstream, okay? It doesn't matter, its Hasids, Litvish, Sephardi, but these are people who have been Haredim for three generations back….

They're like Haredim several generations back, they are conformists, they go to the good schools.… All the Haredi establishment is here. All the politicians, the rabbis, the activists, are here,' she explains, pointing vigorously at the centre column of the chart.

Mainstream Haredim are the largest group of Haredim, but only by a small margin in her estimate. Michal thought that forty percent of Haredim are conforming to mainstream expectations of full-time study in *yeshiva* for men, and very little secular education. Less than half the Haredi population is therefore living according to expectations and social norms. Conformity, however, is powerful within the Haredi world, and the leaders of the Haredi world all exist within that mainstream conforming portion of society. The rabbis whose teachings and edicts dictate acceptability within Haredi society conform to the mainstream, and are slow to accept changes to the accepted values of Haredi society. Living a mainstream Haredi life allows for potentially greater agency within the Haredi world. However, this is not the same as *yichus* as discussed in the previous chapter; people with good *yichus* exist in all three columns above.

Michal moves her finger to the right. 'This is what they call New Haredim,' she says. 'Haredim who went to [university]…. People like me, like my husband, maybe like my parents. Who work, who are not in the *kollel*, who go to university, … some of whom enlist in the army. Usually, they are better off economically. They are also less dependent on the community. And they usually work outside the community. These are not teachers in Haredi schools. Rather, they work in high-tech in Tel Aviv or somewhere else – in a lawyers' office. I'm mixing things here, but they usually also have less children, they're usually also less religious. It goes together. Less fundamentalist.'

I ask her, 'They have only five [children] maybe?'

'Yes, five, not ten,' she answers. 'This is good.'

Michal's 'New Haredim' are the Haredi people taking advantage of the changes

discussed in this chapter. They are using the opportunities available to them to obtain university degrees, and work outside the home in middle class, white-collar jobs. They make a reasonable income to support their families. She suggests that they have fewer children; statistical reports indicate that families with higher degrees in the Haredi sector have one fewer child on average than families without higher education (Regev 2013, 16). My own research found very little evidence to support the theory that the New Middle Class has fewer children, because most of the women whom I met with higher degrees had larger families; however, they are more comfortable in their lifestyle because of the improved level of income available to them. Michal also distinguishes these New Middle Class Haredim as 'less religious;' that is a value judgement based on her own subjectivity, which perhaps also indicates community perceptions and how she views herself. There is certainly a fear in the community that secular education will diminish people's commitment to religion. However, I did not find this to be the case.

Bubbie Brenner, the grandmother in the Karlin-Stolin community, was sent by the Karliner rebbe to obtain a Masters in Social Work in New York before she and her husband made *aliyah* to Israel, over ten years ago.

'I have a degree in social work,' she told me. 'I went to school with the rebbe's *bracha*, I would not go without asking him. And I went to a public school, I mean, a public university, Hunter University of New York, and I knew I wasn't going to be with any, um, I went with one close friend, we were the only Orthodox in my class. But I went with the rebbe's *bracha*. And as soon as I got the degree, the masters, the following year we came here [Jerusalem]. And the rebbe instated me in all his schools as a guidance counsellor. In all the schools, so I work with the children and the parents and the teachers, because he was very much for that, he wanted that.'

Certain *rabbanim*, like the Karliner rebbe, are very encouraging of the pursuit of higher

education, especially for women. Bubbie Brenner is representative of a not insignificant population of Hasidic women who are extremely stringent in their adherence to the strictest Hasidic and Haredi standards, beliefs, and identities, yet would fall under the classification of the New Middle Class. Michal's assumption that these families become less religious reveals how pervasive the attitude that secular education is dangerous. Bubbie Brenner is not part of Michal's exception, her statement that the New Middle Class does not include teachers in the Haredi schools, because while Bubbie works in the schools, she has a high-paying, professional level job, and she works across the Karliner girls' school network, Beis Bracha.

Michal moves on, pointing to the column on the left, now. 'And this is the weakest part of Haredi society,' she says. 'If you spoke about classes— I think it's more. It's all the *ba'alei teshuva*. Not all, because there are always those who managed to get in [the mainstream]. *Ba'alei teshuva*. The very poor.'

'Anglo *ba'alei teshuva* are maybe more like this?' I ask, pointing to the New Middle Class.

'Yes, right,' says Michal. 'Here,' she points to the New Middle Class— 'you can put all the Anglos here, not only *ba'alei teshuva*. Put all the Anglos here [in the New Middle Class]. That's just where they are.'

While Michal is convinced that all English speaking Haredim are part of the New Middle Class, I am not in full agreement with her. I believe they probably have more exposure to secular life, purely through their ability to speak English, and their language skills also create more opportunities for higher paying jobs. But many Anglo *frum* from birth people are firmly in the mainstream. Anglo men may study full time at a *yeshiva* for decades, and their wives may not work at all outside the home, or may work in low-paying teaching positions in the Haredi schools. Therefore, I do not necessarily consider all Anglo Haredim to be part of the New Middle Class, though many are. Lefkowitz, it is worth noting, suggests that all Anglo

Jews in Israel hold a certain amount of privilege and power due to their ability to speak English (2006, 266). This understanding of Anglo privilege may be behind Michal's assertion that all Anglos are part of the New Middle Class. Almost all Anglo *ba'alei teshuvah* are New Middle Class, by virtue of their tendency to be educated and from a middle class background to begin with; indeed, they are arguably the original New Middle Class Haredim. However, a few Anglo *ba'alei teshuvah* fall in the marginalised category, in which Michal places most Israeli *ba'alei teshuvah*.

'*Ba'alei teshuva*, divorced families – women and men. All of them,' she says, pointing to the left-hand column. 'Those with children who dropped out of the educational system. It's not only the children, sometimes it marginalizes the entire family. They are thrown over here.'

A remarkable number of children are excluded over time from the Haredi school systems. *Beis Yaakov*, especially through its focus on strict modest dress codes, has developed an increasingly inflexible ethos; the boys' schools can be similarly inflexible. Once a Haredi girl is excluded from *Beis Yaakov*, there are very few options for her education that allow her to remain within the Haredi world. Attending a non-Haredi school and continuing to live at home places the entire family at risk, both of secular contamination for the other children, but also in terms of future prospects of getting good *shidduchim* and attending respected *yeshivas*.

'The very poor – that often also marginalizes them,' Michal concludes.

The mainstream Haredim are not economically secure; they are in general fairly poor due to the nature of conforming to Haredi social norms. Men do not work and women work in low-income jobs within the community. When Michal says 'the very poor' she is describing the absolute worst off; those whose fathers and husbands have become *schnorrers* [beggars], who knock at doors in the Haredi communities asking for money. This is a not uncommon

occurrence, sometimes happening two or three times each evening in Haredi homes. Most households keep a change container by the door, and give one or two shekels to each *schnorrer*, the equivalent of twenty-five or fifty American cents. This is considered giving *tzedaka*, a mandate of Judaism, and part of being a good Jew. Some of these *schnorrers* are also studying full time in *yeshiva*, and thus people view their begging as worthwhile if somewhat marginal.

'Now you have to understand something,' Michal declares. 'I'll give you an example from my own family. We're here, we were always here [the New Middle Class] – three generations back - here.' She points to the column on the right.

'Okay. But my brothers moved to here – no, let's say one moved to here,' she says, moving her finger to the mainstream column. 'Because he – they went to black [hat] *yeshivas*, didn't take *bagrut* and all that, like didn't study secular subjects. Studied in black *yeshivas*. He is a *yeshiva* student, was one for twenty years. He has ten children, his wife is a teacher in a seminary and he teaches in a *yeshiva*.

'So we're [New Middle Class], my brother moved to [mainstream], okay? Now, his eldest son got married this year. He married someone and she is too, from a family with some twelve children. She's the youngest. All her brothers are *yeshiva* students etc. etc. And then I came to the engagement party and asked her, "What are you studying?" And she said, "I'm studying nursing." So you understand, they moved to [the New Middle Class].'

What Michal is trying to explain is that there is high mobility between these three classes of Haredi society, and within a single family, there can often be people in different classes. Yet they are all accepted as members of the family; no one is excluded because they have joined the New Middle Class by getting a degree. None of these classes indicate a different level of acceptability by the Haredi mainstream.

'Now I'll give you another example,' Michal continues. 'There can be a family that is

here—' she indicates the mainstream— 'but then the parents divorce. Boom, they are thrown over here,' she says, pointing to the marginalised column.

'Now, there can be a family that is [marginalised]– *ba'alei teshuva* from Bat Yam [a secular Israeli area] who came to live in El'ad [Michal's community, a Haredi city]. They have no economic basis, their children are not accepted to the good schools; rather, only to the not so good schools. And then their kid drops out of the educational system and from age fourteen to eighteen he's on the streets and does not go to school,' Michal illustrates. This is unfortunately not uncommon; because of the risk of contamination for the other children, drop-outs are often kicked out by their parents, or otherwise leave voluntarily due to other issues that may have contributed to their school exclusion.

'Okay?' Michal continues. 'But then he enlists in the army, he goes to the Nahal Haredi [the Haredi unit], and then after the army he studies for a bachelor's degree. And then he jumps from here to here.' She jumps her finger from the marginalised column to the New Middle Class. 'Not the entire family, but the situation is very mobile.'

Michal's introduction of the army into the social equation is note-worthy; often army enlistment is seen by the general Israeli public as the way to turn Haredim into more mainstream, secularised members of society. However, in Michal's story, army service transforms her marginalised Haredi boy into a Haredi Middle Class member, rehabilitating him as a Haredim but not transforming him into a secular Israeli.

Michal doesn't see army service as the fundamental transformer of Haredim into secularised Israelis; she believes that must come from the schools and the educational system. 'It is necessary to understand the true correction should be made there [in the schools],' Michal says. She thinks army service will follow on from there. 'It's simple. So, some will enlist, and more do enlist, and every person who enlists and appears with a uniform draws another ten. So, suddenly it is becoming normal, suddenly it is becoming acceptable. In the

past, teens who didn't go to *yeshiva* and who dropped out of the educational system did not enlist in the army. Today in El'ad they are encouraged, the municipality encourages them to enlist. It's considered a success. A child whom they manage to push forward and get him into the army is a success.'

This represents a somewhat triumphant moment for the state; the embrasure of army service for *yeshiva* dropouts is a significant foothold in the Haredi world in terms of forming Haredim into good citizens. However, the negotiation on the part of Haredi leaders is also successful in that they have limited this to dropouts. This serves to spare *yeshiva* attendees from some pressure. It also seems to possess the potential to keep these dropouts within the fold of Haredi life; as Michal suggests, they have the potential to be transformed into Middle Class Haredim. The alternative is that dropouts become radicalised, within the extreme fringes of both the Haredi world and Far Right Zionism, which is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

She continues, 'This is something that is changing radically, but I still believe that it hinges on bringing the Haredim into Israel. And this is through [schooling] and through employment and through the army. But so long as it is not done through the educational system, only the margins are affected.'

Haredim do serve in the army, but only the marginalised sector of Haredim are serving in significant numbers currently. However, army service is transforming the bottom, marginalised third of the Haredi world into the New Middle Class, promoting more affluence and less poverty, and more openness to change. The New Middle Class is where the majority of change is occurring in the Haredi world, and yet it is not considered a betrayal of the Haredi mainstream. On the contrary, the New Middle Class, and the changes it brings, is embraced by the Haredi mainstream as vital to Haredi survival and the future of Haredi life in Israel.

Conclusions

The rapid changes of the most recent decade within the Haredi community in Israel are the result of the constant negotiation of religious values with the state and secular knowledge, managed for the most part by women. Secular knowledge is not completely rejected; but it is used in ways that are understood to ultimately benefit religious values and ethics. This will be further explored in the upcoming chapter. *Ba'alos teshuvah* are fundamental to the introduction of secular knowledge and values into Haredi life. Improved acceptance of secular learning and higher education has also widened these opportunities to the greater Haredi community. Acceptance of secular knowledge reflects an approach which defends minority religious interests, by couching the secular educational institutions within religious ethics, such as maintaining gender separation. This also represents a negotiation with the desires of the state to transform Haredim into productive workers, and therefore better Israeli citizens. Therefore, these Haredi educational options with better secular studies represent incursions of the state, and continued negotiation of Haredi identity in the face of these incursions.

The changes in Haredi housing situations have also been a negotiation between the state and the religious values of Haredim. Haredim value large families; they also live disproportionately in poverty as discussed in previous chapters. Furthermore, the centre region, where the Haredim are disproportionately located, is also where non-Haredi Jews need to live in order to work in the best jobs available. Like the Mizrahim have been pushed to the periphery (Lavie 2018), the Haredim were similarly pressured by lack of building permits in the centre. This policy furthered the Israeli state's agenda to displace growing numbers from the centre into West Bank settlements, and this turned the Haredim into a tool

of the state's expansionist agenda. This will be further explored in Chapter Seven; the implications of it for this chapter are such that the Haredim who moved out of the original, historical Haredi neighbourhoods encountered new ways of thinking about and doing Judaism. The maintenance of the non-Haredi 'other' was broken down. There was more need for negotiation of Haredi ethics with other values than ever before.

Finally, all these changes led to the creation of a Middle Class within the Haredi world. This type of Haredi family, with financial security and stability, has been welcomed by the Haredi mainstream for the support which they offer the rest of the community. Furthermore, it presents a way of negotiating secular knowledge and values with religious ethics, and this supports the continued viability of the Haredi community in the state of Israel. Thus, this chapter explores how Haredim operate as a minority religious community in negotiation with the state and secular knowledge to maintain religious ethics and values. The subsequent chapters will clarify the ways in which this is affecting Haredi political identities and relationships with the state.

All of these changes are being mediated by women, in their roles as negotiators with the secular. In the next chapter, we will examine closely how Haredi women's agency operates, following the knitting metaphor we have established, in order to negotiate these complexities, and other complications.

Chapter Five: Agency and Critique: 'I Want to Fix the Problems, I Don't Want People to Leave'

This chapter argues that Haredi women use their pious agency to critique Haredi society, and to incorporate certain secular knowledge and values into the Haredi world in order to remake forms of Haredi womanhood. They critique by examining and unravelling some of the scarf of Haredi society, and only retaining those threads which they find acceptable. They re-knit this scarf with yarn borrowed from the basket of secular values, selecting only those types which complement Haredi yarns and build a stronger, perhaps a warmer, scarf. Much of this happens in the by-women-for-women arts space. Opportunities in the arts, performing and otherwise (Harris and Skinazi, 2020), have blossomed in the religious world in recent years. However, Haredi women still live in a patriarchal religious society, non-liberal and anti-secular in nature. How do Haredi women operate in their daily lives? To what extent do they have the power to achieve their goals? How do women shape their society and their futures?

The arguments in this chapter are grounded in three anthropological concepts. The first of these is ‘agency,’ the second is ‘critique’ and it is inextricably connected to the first. These terms are defined and detailed in the paragraphs which follow in this section. Within all of these are debates around assumptions and acceptances of meanings of terms like ‘liberal,’ ‘resistance,’ and ‘piety.’ In the previous chapter I established the fundamentals of Haredi

personhood, especially womanhood; these ethics and values are fundamentally implicated in the discussions of agency and critique which unfold below.

Saba Mahmoud introduced the idea of 'agency' to anthropological understandings of religious women in *Politics of Piety* in 2005. Her study was conducted with women who joined the Mosque Movement in Egypt. She challenged assumptions about oppressed and coerced conservative religious women, and suggested that women may choose patriarchal religious communities, and within these communities they have power, though it may take different forms than secular women's power. Mahmood describes agency as 'the ability to autonomously 'choose' one's desires no matter how illiberal they may be'(Mahmood 2005, 12). Fundamental to her understanding of agency is the concept of the religious ethical person as docile (Ibid., 29-30). As discussed in the previous chapter, 'embodied practices and virtues' lead to a 'pious disposition' (Mahmood 2013, 72). Many since Mahmood have taken up the idea of agency, and broadened understandings and applications of it. Avishai underscores the idea that what we describe as agency does not always constitute purposeful conduct, and should not always be equated with resistance (Avishai 2008, 412). In her study of *Dati Leumi* women in Israel, she proposes a form of agency which furthers a religious purpose, rather than a goal that is contradictory to religious personhood (Ibid., 428); the women in her study often choose to do things simply because it is the religious thing to do. It is because they want to reproduce religion that they choose to do religious things. I would argue that she is speaking about the same type of agency as Mahmood but simply using a different vocabulary to do so. Indeed, the agency I describe below involves both docile bodies, like that of Mahmood, and promotes the continued production of religious persons within the Haredi world, like that of Avishai. My exploration of agency contributes to understandings of how religious women negotiate secular knowledge and values with religious ethics, in order to produce a new type of Haredi womanhood. I add invaluable

ethnographic data to the study of agency among religious women, not least because it is with Jewish women. I envision these women's agency as their ability to knit together seemingly opposing strands of secular and religious values, sometimes picking apart both their internal identities and the fabric of Haredi society to do so. This scarf that they knit remains purely Haredi; it is full of complex twists and turns of secular values with religious ethics, but the presence of these two types of yarn are meant to benefit the scarf, maintaining its Haredi-ness, but knitting it to be warmer and stronger.

The final significant question is that of critique: what is meant by 'critique' and how is it employed in this discussion. Critique is inextricably bound up with the work of agency in my understanding; we cannot have agency, the act of knitting, without first critique, the act of recognising that something in the pattern needs to change. If we start at the beginning, critique, in its Greek origins, simply suggested the ability of reason to reveal error (Brown 2013, 3). This, on its own, offers a problematic definition, due to the confabulation of 'reason' with Enlightenment liberal philosophy (Asad 'Free Speech' 2013, 15-17). For some, Foucault's (1997) claim that reason and critique are the hallmark of the secular modern serves the argument that the religious is necessarily *un*reasonable. By establishing the existence of critique in the religious world of Haredi women, I not only undermine these binaries (Brown et al. 2013, viii), I also diminish the secular claim of a 'monopoly on self-reflection' (Ibid.) and provide examples of the secular and religious in coexistence within the religious world. But, if critique is not secular per se, then what is it? It is not simply criticism, though in practice there may be overlap in forms between these two linguistically linked ideas (Asad 'Reply' 2013, 138). But, as Butler says, 'Criticism usually takes an object, and critique is concerned to identify the conditions of possibility under which a domain of objects appears… to interrogate the taken-for-granted categorical schemes through which phenomena appear' (Butler 2013, 102-103). Indeed, in the examples that follow, the question is not of

modesty, for example, but the extent to which modesty has been extended within religious women's and girls' lives. It is within the same-sex art space that the conditions for 'ethical and epistemological promise of "critique"' emerges as opposed to criticism (Asad 'Reply' 2013, 138). Critique of modesty picks apart that section of the scarf, and reknits it in ways that look similar, but are made warmer and stronger with secular yarn from psychology and secular understandings of the body. Contributing to these conditions are the changes which have been discussed previously, especially that of the establishment of the Haredi Middle Class, as has been seen in similar situations elsewhere (Rinaldo 2014, 842-843).

Perhaps one of the most promising premises upon which we can establish understanding is Rinaldo's Pious Critical Agency (Ibid.). Indeed, the examples below are pious in the sense of being enacted within the ethics and values of Haredi personhood, and they are both critical and agentival. However, Rinaldo's 'critical' involves critique in the sense of Islamic engagement with religious text (Ibid., 825), much like the 'critique' described in Irfan Ahmad's work on Islamic critical thinking (Ahmad 2017). Generally, in this work, this is critique which is independent from grounding in religious texts, though it does share a similarity in the differentiation between what is dictated by religion, and what is simply an established cultural norm (Rinaldo 2014, 838). Like Avishai's modern orthodox women (2008), the women who appear in this chapter seek to use religious agency to further religious goals, and like Rinaldo's women (2014), they combine secular ideas and religious values to achieve this. Ultimately, the goal is to improve Haredi society, rather than undo or destroy the Haredi world. As Malha says to me later in this chapter, 'No one is saying that there is nothing wrong in the community. We know there are problems. But I want to work to fix the problems, I don't want people to leave.'

Haredi Women's Agency: Ruth at the Office of the Supervisor for Independent Education

Ruth Colian's battle for her daughter's acceptance at an Ashkenazi *Beis Yaakov* is a demonstration in the effectiveness of religious women's agency within religious society and institutions. Ruth's struggle against the bureaucracy is not unusual for a single Sephardi mother (Lavie 2018); the fact that this struggle is set against the backdrop of the Ministry for Independent Education is the only factor which distinguishes it as a uniquely Haredi encounter. In some ways, this story is representative of what Lavie terms, 'Divinity of Chance' in which 'serendipitous magic [is] required for a lower class mother to accomplish goals' (Lavie 2018, 23 & 228). However, as we see in the story to follow, Ruth is not simply lucky enough to have serendipitous magic grant her a blessing on this day. It is in fact her agency, and the particular agency granted her as a non-liberal religious person, which allows her to achieve her goal. In Chapter Three, I discussed the aspects of prejudice which arose throughout her struggle; the culmination of her efforts brought her to the Office of the Supervisor for Independent Education. The Supervisor shouted at her, and accused her of inappropriate deployment of emotion (Lefkowitz 2006, 264). Her story of that day is an illustration of pious agency, in that she invests in, and inhabits, forms of femininity that illustrate and clarify her piety, and which are therefore above criticism by the rabbi. Ultimately it yields a result for Ruth. Here, we see that the relationship between oppression and resistance is proportional, and that emotion can be leveraged as a weapon of both hegemony and of the weak (Ibid., 265).

'I go again to Jerusalem and there was a suspicious object in the central bus station in Jerusalem and so I was late,' she tells me. Ruth seems to need to tell this story; as she retells it, she is reliving each moment. 'And so when I came to the rabbi in the education office, I was alone in his office, and he said, "Oh, you're late. I'm so sorry, we can't accept you."

‘And I said, “Why? You told me that I just need to come and sign, so what’s the problem? Give me the papers and I will sign!”

‘“No! Shame on you! Lots of people waiting here for you! And now you’re late, and you, you *speak*! Ok, no, I’m so sorry, but I won’t accept you today.”

Ruth continued, ‘I left his office, and I asked the secretary, “Ok, when does the committee meet again?”

‘And she told me, “Wednesday. Next Wednesday.”

‘“Ok, so I will wait here,”’ said Ruth.

‘“What? You will wait…No, not today, honey! *Next* Wednesday!”

‘I said, “Ok, I’m staying. I’ll stay here. I’ll stay here or downstairs or outside, but I’ll wait!”

Ruth’s decision to stay and not move from the Office of the Supervisor for Independent Education is reminiscent of nonviolent protest, as employed by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr; there is also something very Jewish about her choice. In this way, it is a secular tool (Asad 2003, 147), but it shows *chutzpah*; this is a Yiddish word referring to a quality of gutsiness or confidence, almost brazenness. In young children, it is often discouraged in the Haredi world, but as an adult, a certain amount of *chutzpah* will earn one respect (Fader 2009). Ruth is showing her *chutzpah* by choosing to ‘sit-in.’

Ruth continues, ‘She said, “No, you can’t stay here.”

‘I said, “Look, I will tell you something. Today, when I left home, I told my daughter that today we are going to buy a new backpack for school. And that’s what I’m going to do today. So I will stay here, and I will not go back to my home until I know that I can take my daughter the same day to buy a backpack.” She thought that I must be joking, but I stayed, and started to read *tehillim*.’

Tehillim are psalms; in Judaism, reading psalms is a way of praying, and psalms are

considered within the Orthodox tradition to have a special power especially for women. Women form *tehillim* groups, which pray together to expedite finishing the entire book of *tehillim* in a timely fashion. These groups pray for a multitude of things: healing the sick, finding marriage matches for themselves or for single women in their community, praying for children. Ruth's choice to 'sit-in' and read *tehillim* is a way of marking both her piousness and her femininity; it gives her agency to refute the accusations of shamelessness and rudeness thrust upon her by the rabbi.

'She told me that it would be better if I could leave the office,' Ruth tells me, 'so I said, "Ok, I'll sit downstairs on the second floor."

'I was reading *tehillim* and crying. Other people walked by me, and a woman came up to me and said, "Don't worry, everything will be fine, don't worry," and she is Ashkenazi, everyone who works there is Ashkenazi. She sees a Sephardi woman, reading *tehillim* and crying, she knows exactly why I'm crying! She knows, because the discrimination is all over the place! Everybody knows, if you see a Sephardi woman crying, you know exactly why she's crying! And she tells me, "Everything will be fine, don't you cry, God will help you." But I didn't take my head out of the book, because I was in the middle of a *tehilla*.'

Ruth is outraged at this woman's dismissal of her plight; her words suggest that she feels the woman is condescending, or perhaps morally superior in a holier-than-thou way. Yet Ruth does not respond with words or action. Instead, she continues to pray and read *tehillim*. She does the most correct thing, religiously speaking: she does not interrupt mid-prayer, mid-psalm, but ignores this woman and continues to pray. Strictly speaking, one should not interrupt a prayer mid-blessing or mid-psalm, though of course people do all the time. By ignoring her and continuing to pray, Ruth is marking her own piety, almost in reaction to the false promises of God's help from the Ashkenazi woman.

'After something like two and a half hours, the rabbi came downstairs, maybe he was

going out for a smoke or something, and he saw me.

'He came up to me and said, "You don't have shame! All of the people waiting for you and you dare to insult us, this is rude, and you're staying here!"

'I heard him but I didn't listen to him,' Ruth says, 'and I just kept crying and reading *tehillim*. Then he saw me when he was going back up again.'

She doesn't use his passing to entreat him; nor does she respond to the abuse he rains upon her. Ruth persists in her piety, her only proof that she is a good woman. Furthermore, she does not interrupt her prayer to respond to him; this is the correct thing to do, *halachically*, and therefore she is in that moment more pious and more righteous than him.

'And after two hours [more], I think, maybe just one and a half hours, the secretary called me, saying, "Hi, you still downstairs?"

'I said, "Yes, it's not Wednesday. I'm going to be here until next Wednesday."

'"Ok, come upstairs, the rabbi wants to speak with you."

'And then I go upstairs, and he says, "Ok, here's the paper, make your signature, and I hope I don't see you again!"' She laughs, her relief palpable even years later.

Ruth's choices may seem like *in*action to the non-religious, but in fact her prayers and tears are far more effective than letters, protests, or any other form of action. The Supervisor for Independent Schools is Haredi; he oversees mainly Haredi schools, rather than expensive private schools. He lives in the Haredi world and expects women (and men) to behave in certain ways. Ruth's only hope of success was through her piety and modesty as a Haredi woman. Her prayers, literally, worked; the rabbi could not ignore her, nor could he continue to characterise her as a shameless, rude Sephardi woman. Ruth nonetheless also behaves as if she is in a 'sit-in', a feature of non-violent protest in the 20th century and beyond. She knits together this approach with the values of Haredi piety, and achieves her goal.

Ruth's actions are an excellent example of religious women's agency, of knitting together

secularity and Haredi values, especially in the face of *Da'as Torah* and the combined role of politician and religious leader. Ruth was seeking better religious education, a better religious life, a better future for her daughter in the religious world; it is a religious school, but a ministry official oversees it. The ministry official is, of course, a rabbi, so he is both an agent of the establishment and an agent of the religious institutions in power in the Haredi world. Ruth must operate as a religious woman within these structures. Her piety will allow her success, rather than her anger, eloquence, or even the legal system.

Agency and Critique in the Dance School[14]

Modest dress and *tsnius* are a huge focus of the dance school with which I conducted the most extensive ethnography. Rachel Factor's Jerusalem Center for the Performing Arts holds classes for adult women during the day at a public library in Ma'alot Dafna, and after school at a *Beis Yaakov* in Sanhedriya HaMurchevet. Rachel, a convert, was a professional dancer in Hollywood and on Broadway before her marriage and conversion. She teaches modern lyrical dance; her co-teacher, Lexie Koh, a *ba'alas teshuvah* who received classical dance instruction growing up, teaches ballet and pointe. The Center also offers tap, gymnastics, and drama classes. They maintain a high level of rigor and professionalism in their dance school, which has gained a good reputation throughout the observant world. It is because of this reputation that I chose to concentrate on the Rachel Factor school over other dance schools for this chapter.

One evening, when I was getting on the public bus after an unrelated arts performance, I helped a Hasidic woman visiting from London with directions to a distant area of Jerusalem. She said, 'Are you going there, too?'

[14] This section is in large part published in the summer edition of *Shofar*; some minor changes have been made to update the accuracy with contemporary information and correct an editing error.

'*Neyn*,' I replied in Yiddish, which we were speaking. 'I don't live there, but I go to dance classes there every week.'

Her eyes grew wide. 'You dance with Rachel Factor?' she asked with awe.

I smiled. 'I'm not very good.'

'But that dance school is the best,' she said to me.

This woman's knowledge of the school, and her admiration of it, are important for several reasons. She is marked by both the Yiddish she prefers, and the turban with which she covers her hair, as an extremely stringently observant Hasidic woman, who was raised within the Haredi world. Yet she has heard of this dance school, and moreover, approves of the school. The Rachel Factor Dance School is not only accepted by the Haredi mainstream, it has achieved some limited sense of fame within the Haredi world. Occupying this place of prestige is something that Rachel and Lexie have invested thoughtfully and carefully in achieving, but it is also a precarious position, fraught with ethical danger, which needs to be continuously mediated. This precarity is at the heart of the story of Shoshi Brody, another dance teacher who achieved similar levels of respect and renown in the Haredi world, but, shortly before I began my fieldwork, foreswore dance for the rest of her life as the result of a spiritual catastrophe.

Shoshi Brody, though frum from birth, had the privilege of private dance classes with world-class teachers while she was growing up. Her dance school taught tap and modern dance, and she required all her students to dance in *tsnius* attire. In a 2007 newspaper interview, she said, 'Most of the girls come from ultra-Orthodox homes and the concept of modesty is ingrained into their psyche to the extent that they see it as wrong to appear immodestly clothed in front of anyone…. There are many Haredim who consider any form of dance immodest as it places emphasis on the body' (Keller 2007). Brody's classes became known throughout the Haredi world, and she started to train girls to perform professionally.

Later in the 2007 interview, she says, 'Unlike the majority of the pupils who only perform at the end of year show, these girls perform to women throughout the country. They are interested in pursuing dance professionally and although there are limited opportunities for religious women in this field at the moment, I believe that with the increasing number of talented religious performers making their homes in Israel, this will start to change' (Ibid.).

Brody did much of the work of breaking down religious barriers to performing arts and dance in the Haredi world. It is relevant that she was *frum* from birth; her status allowed her to facilitate change within the politics of Haredi piousness. However, a few years ago, Brody abruptly shut down her dance school, and according to the rumours I heard throughout the women's performing arts world, declared she would never dance again. Yehudis told me that Brody felt the body focus had become 'too unhealthy,' and while her dancers were outwardly *tsnius*, the mentality had become 'un-*tsnius*', with too much pressure to be thin. Another woman told me she heard that there were dancers in the Brody school who had developed eating disorders. These are rumours, and therefore may not be true; they are much more significant as indicators of the perceptions surrounding dance in the Haredi world, and the prevalence of the concern that dance will lead girls to become too focussed on their bodies.

In the Haredi world, dance is considered dangerous in terms of its capacity to destroy the interiority of *tsnius*: that *tsnius* is reduced to simply an external habit, and the dancer's focus can transition from piety to superficial physical considerations of beauty. It also situates the psychological illnesses classed as disordered eating as non-Haredi and therefore secular, and thus secular psychological problems can be avoided by maintaining Haredi ethical personhood.[15] Understanding *tsnius* and dance in light of the implications for the formations of piety, and in the context of the history of Brody's dance school, clarifies the Factor dance

[15] For scholarly research on eating disorders in the Haredi world, please see Bachner-Melman and Zohar (2019), and Latzer et al. (2019).

school's approach to *tsnius*, and complicates the further issues of embodiment which I discuss below.

'*Tsnius* was important to us [me and Rachel] from day one,' Lexie tells me as we sit on a low wall outside of the *Beis Yaakov*. She says the younger girls were fine—it was the adult women who shocked her by stripping down to nothing but a leotard at their first classes. 'Even the Hasidic ones!' she exclaimed. At least four of the adults in the school are members of the Gur community. 'So from right then, it became important to keep the *tsnius* factor high.'

Inside, the assistants (a role developed for the older girls by Rachel and Lexie to promote mentoring and leadership) are showing Rachel the dance they've choreographed themselves for the end-of-year show. She encourages them and praises them, excitedly revelling in their creativity. As she turns off the music, she says to them, 'We're going to have to think about the costumes you will be wearing. With those moves you have at the beginning, we are going to need to be sure your skirt will stay covering your knees.' The girls and Rachel debate the merits of certain modifications to their skirts versus the dancers' ability to have full range of movement. Two weeks later, at the performance, I notice that the beginning of the choreography has been modified somewhat to remove some of the most problematic moves, such as the girls lifting their bodies heavenward from the floor by leading with their pelvises. A smoke machine is also employed, creating a wall of fog at the beginning of the dance so thick that I am unable to clearly see what is happening on stage. It gradually dissipates as the teenagers move on to less *tsnius*-ly questionable movements, away from hip-swerves and abdominal flexes.

Superficially, the focus on *tsnius* at the Rachel Factor Dance School could simply be seen as an extension of the increasing stringency throughout the Haredi world. Under examination it appears more purposeful, because the commitment to *tsnius* serves to maintain the school's

impeccable reputation, and reassure parents who entrust their daughters to Rachel's and Lexie's oversight. Thus, *tsnius* allows Rachel and Lexie agency in their goal of forming their dancers into ethical Haredi subjects.

Rachel tells me about the work she does in schools, where she is invited to teach dance and drama to girls who may not already be enrolled in her dance classes. Following the common dramatic partner-based exercise of staring deeply into each other's eyes for a protracted, silent moment, she says girls start to feel comfortable sharing their most vulnerable thoughts with the group. 'The tell me they're doing it, they're staying religious, for the social aspects. They do their religious practice by rote, they don't feel anything, they don't feel connected. They have questions about God. In the community, everything has to be perfect. People are afraid to show they are struggling, and the community isn't very good at addressing it. People wear masks.'

'I haven't thrived in the community,' says Lexie. 'Maybe it's my streak of American BT [*ba'alas teshuvah*] independence.'

Lexie and Rachel offer a critique of Haredi society: that superficial community social norms are at fault for preventing young women from developing a pious Haredi personhood. The teachers use dance and drama techniques—secular techniques of embodiment—to develop the interior Haredi ethic in their students' docile bodies.

'I get them to dance *tehillim*,' Rachel tells me. 'Dancing a *tehilla* [singular, 'psalm'] can be so much more meaningful than just saying the words. They can connect with it. Dance gets them thinking, connecting with their emotions. We are saying the words with all of ourselves. You can see it in their faces, they're expressing their struggles, they're dealing with it. They are taking off the mask.'

Using the secular technique of dance, once eschewed[16] by the Haredi community for

[16] Eschewed for women. There is a long tradition of dance and prayer for men in the Hasidic community.

immodestly focussing on the body, now allowable through Rachel's and Lexie's agency due to their commitment to *tsnius*, the dancers reinforce Haredi ethical personhood via a new form of embodied piety. Not only has *tsnius* allowed the dancers the space of critique, the space has itself created a new mode of embodiment to form the Haredi ethical self. Dance is a radically new way to shape the docile bodies of its subjects into a pious formation.

The dance school space has also been a space of critique of *tsnius*, or rather the length to which *tsnius* has been taken, despite *tsnius* being a component of dancers' agency. Rachel and Lexie both spoke about the obstacles formed by some attitudes adopted as part of the stringency of *tsnius* in the Haredi world.

'A lot of *frum* women don't know anything about their bodies, and that's really dangerous,' Lexie tells me one evening, while we look out over the valley between Sanhedriya and Ramat Shlomo. 'They're having babies, and they don't know what's going on with them.'

She describes beginner dance classes, in which she instructs girls to contract or tighten certain muscles, and they have no idea what she means. They can't name the parts of their bodies. She is concerned women don't know how to take care of themselves or recover after giving birth. 'I see these dance classes as improving body awareness and body comfort.'[17]

'We have to teach the girls how to use the mirror,' Rachel tells me. During class, I hear her urging the dancers to check their form in the mirror. Despite a wall of mirrors at the front of the rehearsal space, the girls don't often look at their reflection.

'They're told they're not supposed to be looking at themselves in the mirror,' Lexie explains. 'They've been told it's not modest.'

For the first several years, Rachel and Lexie avoided touching the dancers at all,

[17] Possibly without being aware of such parallels, Lexie is articulating the same goals and processes as embodied agency in the treatment of teens with anorexia nervosa in Meekums 'Embodiment in Dance Movement Therapy Training Practice' (2006).

instead explaining to them what to do, and demonstrating it themselves. But the year that I spent with the school was the first which they decided they had to start directly positioning and adjusting the dancers' forms physically, as any other teacher would in any other dance school. 'We were nervous about it in prior years,' Lexie explains, 'but now we're being more physical. We will see if there will be any fallout. We haven't heard any complaints yet.'

She describes how many of the girls flinched the first time she gently lifted an arm or corrected a shoulder. Though they don't flinch anymore, there is often plenty of giggling when she's repositioning a girl. 'And there are still places I don't touch. I don't do any of the hips in isolation. Do you know that for these girls, *tuchus* [Yiddish for 'rear end'] is even a bad word?' But she struggles with her pointe class; they don't understand how to activate their gluteus muscles, the engagement of which is fundamental for correct form.

Rachel and Lexie articulate a secular-liberal understanding of psychology (Asad 2003, 53). While investing in the non-liberal *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) of the *tsnius* exterior forming the Haredi ethical interior, they nonetheless also inhabit the secular *habitus* of the scientific body. They therefore seek a *tsnius* which includes these values of body consciousness; they articulate them as 'healthy,' suggesting that the detachment of the Haredi habitus from the physicality of the body is dangerous. Indeed, given the public health issues surrounding delayed breast cancer detection in the Haredi community and resultant increased morbidity, it would seem, from a secular-liberal understanding which values medical intervention, that there is in fact mortal danger in the Haredi habitus if taken to the extreme. In Rachel's and Lexie's shaping of dancers' docile bodies, they seek to create a Haredi ethical personhood that values medical intervention and the secular value of body comfort to promote the physical health of Haredi women. This critiques current increases in stringency as harmful to women, and presents a new form of *tsnius* and Haredi ethical personhood, one which combines non-liberal ideas of the exterior shaping the interior ethic with secular values

of the interior intellect which inhabits a physical body.

Rachel and Lexi have examined the scarf of Haredi identity around modesty issues and found it insufficient. They undertake a practice of unpicking the rows upon rows of stitches of modesty, breaking these down in themselves and in the women and girls in their dances school. Using yarn from secular ideology around psychology and body positivity, Rachel and Lexie re-knit the scarf to be warmer, and stronger. These analogies, of warmth and strength in the scarf of Haredi society, are particularly apt in this instance. The ways in which Rachel and Lexie invest in a new production of Haredi modesty is meant to support young women who might otherwise be lost to Haredi society, and to maintain their Haredi identity and feelings of inclusion and support within the community. They are truly building a warmer, stronger Haredi identity and society.

Two days before the end-of-year show, I lean back against a wall with Malha, the mother of some of the dancers, as we watch the littlest girls turn circles with their arms over their head to the song 'Singing in the Rain.' Malha grew up *frum* in Jerusalem, with American parents, and so we speak in English. We have been discussing the rise in morbidity of breast cancer in the Haredi world, and the way women and girls are taught to feel and think about their bodies. Malha pauses as we watch the little girls, her brow furrowed in thought.

'No one is saying that there is nothing wrong in the community,' she says, her face serious. 'We know there are problems. But I want to work to fix the problems, I don't want people to leave.'[18]

As the tiny girls reach for the sky on their highest tiptoes, one of the older girls shouts, '*B'simcha* [with joy]! Thank *Hashem* for the *bracha* of rain!' Their tiny faces shine,

[18] This quote was published in *Shofar* Summer 2020 with the word 'people' missing; that is an error, and the quote as it appears here is correct.

and one of them closes her eyes in prayer-like concentration. Her little skirt hangs below her knees, and in that moment, her interior piety, shaping itself already at age six, is visible. While many other Haredi girls do not receive these opportunities, the Haredi community's support and respect for Rachel Factor's dance school indicates a growing acceptance of these new modes of piety and Haredi ethical personhood, and a Haredi society which will continue to accommodate select secular values to create an enduring though dynamic Haredi future.

The Mask She Wears: A Different Kind of Musical

The Mask She Wears opened in December 2015 in Jerusalem and Beit Shemesh, with indications of the thematic elements that were considered sensitive for Haredi audiences: the posters and program listed rabbinical guidance, and there was an age warning in addition to the normal *kol isha* warning. In brief, the musical examines the lives of three young women: Rivka, Bassi, and Shani. Each of them harbours secrets, three different struggles that, while common, each feels the need to hide. Rivka faces growing debts and abject poverty, which could be remedied if her husband takes a job offer in the United States; he is the star of the *yeshiva*, however, and they are loath to leave Israel. Bassi and her husband are undergoing fertility treatments, having been married for nearly seven years without conceiving. Shani hides the fact that her homelife is nearly unbearable due to her husband's mistreatment of her. In order to see the internal struggles of each woman, the play uses the mechanism of 'Thought Shadows,' in which a separate actress personifies the thoughts and emotions of each of the main characters. The play portrays these women's struggles and the pain that they inadvertently cause each other. Each storyline reaches a realistic resolution, which allows the play complexity.

The Thought Shadows who illuminate the internal worlds of the three main characters

display the struggle that is at the centre of the Haredi ethical formation of the self. In order to form the pious self, Haredi teachings dictate that every Jewish soul struggle against the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, which is innate to all humans. While the Thought Shadows often articulate emotions that the women keep to themselves, they also sometimes display the struggle against the *yetzer hara* that is part of the inner formation of the pious self, especially in Rivka's story. Rivka is at home in the second scene, where she has just phoned her husband to tell him that they cannot afford a chicken for *shabbos*. As she reflects on their financial struggles, she thinks about her friends Shani and Bassi. 'When you have money, everything looks different,' she mutters, allowing herself a moment of jealousy. For the first of only two times in the play, her Thought Shadow turns, and they acknowledge each other's presence. With a raised eyebrow of disapproval, her Thought Shadow clears her throat. Rivka quickly says, 'But that's not important. *Hashem* gave me everything I need.' She turns to the Thought Shadow and says, 'Good save,' to which the Thought Shadow replies, 'Anytime.'

This is one of the few times the play is directly instructive; it acknowledges the fact that jealousies arise and creates the example of the pious self that triumphs over the jealous feelings of the *yetzer hara*. The audience chuckles, a brief breath of embarrassment and relief: while those feelings of jealousy are condemnable, they are also relatable. In this way, a moment of togetherness is created; these moments occur throughout the play and amplify the pious critiques and agentival power of the play. However, this scene serves to underscore the prevalent message in Haredi society that women should thank God for what they have, rather than covet what they do not. Many feminist scholars would classify this as an example of internalised oppression (Myers 2002, 5-6); however, like Mahmood, I read these religious women's agency in their ability to achieve what they want (2005, 10), and there is much more to be gained from examining this conversation in context.

This self-correction occurs after Rivka wrestles with her options to earn more money.

Before she covets the money of the others, she thinks about becoming a nurse, like Bassi. This vocation would give her more income, which would mean that her husband could continue to learn in *yeshiva*. Therefore, this situation is one of virtue: she is trying her best to uphold Haredi values and form herself into a pious wife. Ultimately, her Thought Shadow presents the real obstacle: 'But you would need all that training' (Goldman 2016, scene 2). Within this context, the scene suddenly becomes a critique: if Rivka had more skills, she would be able to get a better job, earn more money, and support her husband in *yeshiva*. This message, that if Rivka had more skills, the family could stay and her husband could continue to learn in *yeshiva*, is reiterated in scene 5 at the office of a career advisor. To Rivka's list of skills, the woman responds, 'Well, darling, in today's job market, that's like saying that you're very good at breathing' (Ibid., scene 5). It becomes apparent that Rivka has no useful skills. Esther Goldman's play offers a critique of Haredi society for limiting the secular education of women. Esther's agency for this critique stems from her choice to frame it as limiting Rivka's ability to fulfil the requirements of Haredi ethical womanhood.

This critique is underscored by the *shiur* offered by the learned and respected Rebbetzin Fein near the end of the play. The Rebbetzin occupies a place of authority, especially in the absence of male characters, including rabbis. She is, essentially, the agent of the absent rabbi. The scene opens on the end of the *shiur*, where she is speaking about *Hishtadlus*, or the idea that God only helps people who have first exerted the necessary effort themselves. The Rebbetzin says, 'You do your *Hishtadlus*, and leave the rest to *Hashem*.' Therefore, there is a context in the play, rooted in Jewish teachings and the Haredi value system, for the argument that a person must do the best that they can before God gives them what they need. By articulating this Haredi value of *Hishtadlus*, the critique that Haredi society has left Rivka without skills, and this has led to the cessation of her husband's *yeshiva* learning, which is the most important Haredi social value, becomes unassailable. Rivka is

unable to exert the maximum effort—she cannot achieve *Hishtadlus*—because of the limits set by social norms. Like *tsnius* in the dance classes discussed previously, *Hishtadlus* offers agency to the playwright in critiquing Haredi society within Haredi ethical boundaries.

In Chapter Two, we witnessed the scene in which Shani confesses her marital problems to Rebbetzin Fein. The scene, again, is as follows:

Shani: 'So, Rebbetzin, you were saying *tefillah* [prayer] is a conduit for all *bracha*."

Rebbetzin Fein: 'Correct.'

Shani: 'And if you're *davening*, you're doing your *Hishtadlus*.'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'Davening, with other *Hishtadlus*, yes.'

Shani: 'What if a person doesn't *daven*?'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'Ever? Oh, even if she has children, a woman still has an obligation to *daven* at least one *tefillah* a day.'

Shani: 'No, I meant—' [pause] 'I—' [pause] 'I meant, a man. If a man doesn't *daven*.'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'Oh. A man.'

Shani begins to cry. She tells the Rebbetzin about her struggles.

Rebbetzin Fein: 'Thank you for coming to me about this, Shani. You're doing the right thing.'

Shani: 'I am?'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'But Shani, this is an unacceptable situation.'

Shani: 'I know. I haven't been trying hard enough. I need to take more *shalom beis* [peace in the home] classes.'

Rebbetzin Fein shakes her head and speaks forcefully.

Rebbetzin Fein: 'No, Shani. The way your husband is behaving—'

Shani: 'What?'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'This is not the way a Jewish husband treats his wife.'

Shani: 'But it's me. I must be doing something wrong.'

Rebbetzin Fein, shaking her head again: 'From what you're telling me, you're doing everything you can to repair the relationship. And making yourself miserable in the process' (Ibid., scene 13).

This conversation between Shani and Rebbetzin Fein can be seen as a critique of the way Haredi society has shaped wives: Shani believes that she is solely responsible for her husband's happiness, and his ethical failings are her responsibility:

Rebbetzin Fein: 'But a healthy relationship takes two healthy people to make it work. Sounds like Avi is unhappy, too.'

Shani: 'But isn't it my fault, then? Isn't it my job to make my husband happy?'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'No, no, no, Shani. Avi's a big boy.'

Shani: 'But, I thought, if my husband's so unhappy, I must be a failure.'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'Oh, Shani, what a heavy burden you've been carrying' (Ibid.).

This, therefore, is a critique of the earlier understanding of virtuous Haredi womanhood, in which a woman's purpose is to support her husband. The Rebbetzin's correction of this misunderstanding is particularly unassailable, again, because of the earlier introduction of the idea of *Hishtadlus*; when the Rebbetzin tells Shani she has done all that she possibly can, and it is not her fault, Esther has given the Rebbetzin the agency to absolve Shani and clarify this portion of the formation of Haredi ethical womanhood.

Like the dancers, Esther's writing also reveals an introduction of the secular conceptions of health and well-being. The Rebbetzin talks about 'healthy' marriages and 'healthy' people:

Rebbetzin Fein: 'Shani, you must start therapy. At the very least, by yourself. You need the support a therapist can offer you while you're dealing with this difficult situation. It's not

productive to have everything trapped inside your head.'

Shani: 'But Avi just makes fun of me every time I bring up ways to communicate better.'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'Shani, you're at a crossroads in your marriage.'

Shani begins to cry again.

Rebbetzin Fein: 'You must make that clear to Avi. He has to be willing to work on this, the marriage, to survive. You may be enabling his unhealthy behaviours by protecting him from their consequences. If he's unwilling to go to counselling with you, then he's crossed a red line. I may not be a therapist myself, but I know that the right therapist can help you air your feelings in the right, safe environment.'

Shani: 'A safe environment?'

Rebbetzin Fein nods.

Shani: 'Where? How do I find—?'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'Be in touch after *shabbos*. I can refer you to people that I really trust.'

Shani: 'Thank you so much, Rebbetzin Fein.'

Rebbetzin Fein: 'No, Shani. Thank you for coming to me for help' (Ibid., scene 14).

This scene reflects the acceptance of secular psychology in the Haredi world. The Rebbetzin's advice to see a therapist and seek couples' counselling displays familiarity with and investment in secular understandings of psychology and therapeutic treatment; her further distinction between herself as untrained and a professional indicates a respect for the secular education and qualification systems. The Rebbetzin does not suggest they enter couples' counselling with herself and the Rav, though working exclusively with rabbinical authorities and their affiliates would not be uncommon in the Haredi world. Given that the script was under rabbinical supervision, I believe that the Rebbetzin's advice is part of the overall shift in the Haredi world toward a trust in secular therapeutic expertise, which I discuss later in this chapter. Usually, this secular therapeutic expertise is offered by someone

who is a member of the Haredi community and has received higher education.

In the acceptance of psychology, we see the agency of women at work, and how this agency achieves chance across the whole of society. Women have endeavoured to weave in the yarn of psychological therapeutics, strengthening the scarf of Haredi society. Therefore, within Shani's story, we see an example of Haredi social change in the employment of secular knowledge and expertise to support and improve the Haredi community; in order to accommodate such a shift, there also must be a hybridisation of how Haredi people understand embodied personhood, to be both a pious self but also one made up of the separate entities of psyche and body.

As the play closes, upstage is transformed into the Western Wall, the actresses facing it with their backs to the audience. As they mime the actions of praying, the voice of the playwright speaks:

'Every one of us wears a mask. Sometimes, when you're at the *kosel* [Western Wall], you can look around and see each woman taking off the mask she wears, and crying her heart out to *Hashem*, who hears all thoughts. *Hashem* knows your deepest wishes and fears. He's not fooled by the mask. He sees us all as the precious souls we are, longing to come close to Him. All of us want the same thing, in its infinite variations. We want *Hashem* to take care of our problems, big and small, make them all go away, so that we can serve Him properly. And, if it is His will that they not go away, that He gives direction on how to change our lives so that we may cope with them. You can hear the echo of the heartfelt *tefillos* [prayers] left at the *kosel* for the *tsurah* [Yiddish, 'troubles'] each woman bears in her heart. She wipes her tears, composes her face, and puts her mask on again, then turns around to face the world. To face' [pause] 'you' (Ibid., scene 16).

In this final speech, the audience experiences togetherness, and compassion. In the recording, small sobs can be heard in the audience. In this moment, the playwright's goal is

clarified. 'This play is intended to raise sensitivity in the *klal* [group], [and] to increase awareness that other people are dealing with other *nisyonos* [trials and tribulations] than you are. My goal in bringing this into the public arena will have been achieved if everyone walks out with a resolve to be more careful about making casual [and] not-so-casual comments that may be painful in ways that she never understood before,' reads the Note from the Director/Playwright in the playbill.[19] Esther reiterates this message when I visit her at her home in Ma'alot Dafna. 'The play touched something very deep for a lot of the women who have seen it,' Esther tells me. 'My point was about getting people to understand that other people in Haredi society are grappling with different issues than they are, and increasing an awareness of those issues, in order to raise people's sensitivity to one another.' In this final scene, Esther has brought the audience a feeling of togetherness, where her critiques can be accepted, and indeed shared by the women watching, in order to fundamentally change who they are and how they relate to each other.

There is, at the heart of this, a critique: that people become isolated, consumed with their own problems, which eclipses their thoughtfulness towards others. It resonates with the critique of the dance teachers, that the Haredi community demands its members hide any imperfection. Esther's mode of instruction to the docile bodies of the women who are her audience is to reshape each woman's individual struggle as part of the social: because all women bring their problems to God, though all women feel alone in their problems, God's compassion for all women's suffering reframes the individual as a member of the group. Therefore, the ideal Haredi womanhood becomes enmeshed in the social, as much as within the individual, in a way that is perhaps more compassionate toward the individual and less focussed upon conformity. She has examined the scarf of Haredi society, and found it lacking in similar ways to Rachel and Lexie; like them, she has attempted to reknit this section with

[19] Playbill used with permission of Esther Goldman.

greater use of the yarn of community building in the women's space of the arts.

Music, Catharsis, and Truth

As discussed in the section concerning *The Mask She Wears*, secular expertise in psychology and therapeutic counselling techniques have become increasingly accepted in the Haredi world. Many rabbanim have recognised the need for these things within even the most closed sectors of Haredi society, and psychology, counselling, and social work are some of the most popular degrees in the Haredi world. Women are most often the ones who are sent to earn these degrees. The Karliner rebbe is among the leaders on this type of initiative, as his former secretary told me:

'[The rebbe is] interested in seeing that things remain, uh, happy, uh, healthy, actually, relationship, even kids. You know, if some guy has a problem he has no problem with sending him to a psychologist or a therapist or something and so on. And he's very up to date in these things. Extremely up to date in keeping things well balanced.'

This was the reasoning behind Bubbie Brenner's pursuit of a degree at Hunter College, discussed in the previous chapter. This casts women in the role of the bearers of secular expertise, and this is sometimes what allows them agency to do some extremely powerful knitting of the secular into the religious. Their expertise is respected by these community leaders that allow it, and it is sought after. Despite the growing prevalence and acceptance of seeking psychological therapy, however, there continues to be hesitancy in many parts of Haredi society. Instead, my interlocutors found that many women use artistic exploits as therapeutic outlets, and indeed many artistic instructors take on roles that are part teacher, part therapist.

Lizzi Serling has been offering voice lessons to women and girls for several years, and

she discusses how she focuses on ‘breaking down the voice, and then building it up again.’

‘Sometimes it’s almost like I’m breaking down the singer and building them up again,’ she confesses. ‘Teaching has been really special. My students open up about how learning has enabled them to be strong and confident.’

Lizzi enjoys teaching voice more than she ever expected, because it is such a different experience than her own growing up. ‘It’s more about the voice, and less about the ego. I make space for my students to experiment.

‘There’s something really vulnerable and emotional about the voice and singing,’ she says. ‘Some of my students have a really difficult home life, and the lessons make them feel like they’ve expressed themselves. It’s really like therapy.’

There is, she says, a darker side to being treated as people’s therapist. ‘I hate being made into a BT dog and pony show,’ she says to me. I ask her to clarify.

‘There are these kinds of shows where people want me to talk about my life, how I chose to be *frum*, for a crowd,’ she explains. ‘I feel like there are questionable motives behind this, like this insecurity. Like, are things actually better outside the community? I’m not sure how much I’m a representative to make people feel better about that. BT stories can be really dehumanising. I’m a singer, I’m not a rebbetzin. I’m not inherently wise.’

Within the voice lesson studio, though, she loves the way she can help her students transform. ‘I can help anyone, no matter what’s up at school or at home, feel like they’ve accomplished something, and developed a skill,’ she says. ‘But really, it’s more than that. I have personally experienced real catharsis with music, and if I can help others experience that, then I’m doing my job.’

There is, at the heart of this, a mild critique of Haredi homes in which children cannot find these supports and transformations; of schools that stifle and make children feel unaccomplished; that Lizzi’s place is a place to be heard. Lizzi helps her students undo the

stitches of pain in their identities, and helps to reknit them in ways that are informed by her values from the secular world, but maintains their Haredi identity. There is also concern over a society that looks to *ba'alei teshuvah* for legitimisation and proof that Haredi life is the correct path. Lizzi's song 'I Can't Be' speaks to the enormous pressure on performers, *ba'alos teshuvah*, and women that exists within the Haredi world:

I Can't Be
Lizzi Serling

Do I offend you when I'm walking down the street?
And should I pretend to be something I can't be?
Should I wonder what you think at the end of the day?
Or should I close my eyes and let it drift away?

CHORUS:
Because…
I can't be, I can't be, what you need me to be.
And I can't see, I can't see, what you need me to see.
Do you live your life through another's eyes?
Do you paint your story with little lies?

Did I say the right thing? Did my words seem free?
Are my songs too raw? Do I make myself too seen?
Should I put my guitar under lock and key?
Should I try to guess (Ooh) what you want from me?

CHORUS

Do you like my hair? Do you like my clothes? Do you like my lyrics? Do you like my prose?
Do you like my fingers? Do you like my toes?
Do I know my friends and do I know my foes?

If you see my face, will you say hello?
Or will I fade into names that you don't know?
Am I too strict or am I too free?
Do you know what you don't like about me?

CHORUS

Layer 1: One day I will be free (repeat)

Layer 2: Do you like my hair? Do you like my clothes? Do you like my lyrics? Do you like my prose?
Do you like my fingers? Do you like my toes?
Do I know my friends & do I know my foes

Layer 3: I can't be, I can't be, what you need me to be.
And I can't see, I can't see, what you need me to see.
Do you live your life through another's eyes?
Do you paint your story with little lies?

Lizzi's song questions the Haredi preoccupation with levels of stringency, asking 'Am I too strict or am I too free?' She reminds people that this concern with women's modesty, women's 'hair,' 'clothes,' 'fingers,' and 'toes,' has perhaps gone too far into superficiality, asking, 'Do I offend you when I'm walking down the street?' She suggests that society would be better to focus on human relationships, 'If you see my face will you say hello?' and that perhaps people should practice less judgement: 'Do you know what you don't like about me?' Finally, she suggests that people should look for their own answers within themselves, rather than seeking *ba'alos teshuvah* narratives to confirm their fears and make them feel vindicated for staying *frum*. 'Do you live your life through another's eyes? Do you paint your story with little lies?'

When this song is taken in comparison with Lizzi's earlier work, 'Enough,' it is a harsh critique. Lizzi embraces religious life, and is fully committed to staying *frum* and continuing to be part of the community, but that doesn't keep her from critiquing those aspects of Haredi society which she finds troubling. Lizzi uses song to examine the dropped stitches in the scarf of Haredi society. Her words from our previous conversation resurface: 'I chose this because I'm trying to live a truthful life.' Lizzi uses her art to hold Haredi society to account for its dysfunctions and hypocrisy, to critique those aspects she finds disingenuous, and to live her life as truthfully and piously as she is able.

Art as Therapy, Therapy as Art

Bridging the worlds of performance and therapy, Playback Theater has become hugely popular of late in the Haredi world. First conceived by Jonathan Fox and Jo Solas as informal, improvised group theatre with influences from psychodrama and the American experimental theatre movement, it has a significant reputation for meaningful community building, identity formation, and conflict resolution in a wide range of applications, as well as providing mental health benefits (see Fox 2007, Rivers 2015, Sanders 2008). In a Playback workshop, an audience member shares a personal story with the group; something that has haunted them, or something with which they are struggling. The Playback Theatre group then acts out the story for the audience. By doing this, the audience members can develop empathy for their antagonist, as well as for themselves.

'We seek to symbolise their world in a way that is empathetic,' explains Yehudis.

The proliferation of Playback can be understood two ways: one the one hand, women may be using their agency of being in a caring role in order to participate in improvisational theatre— the fact that it offers a form of care is what allows so many women to participate in theatre. Or it could work the other way around: the fact that by-women-for-women arts is acceptable allows women to provide therapeutic opportunities for their community. I believe it is the latter for two reasons: firstly, there are a few Haredi women's improvisational comedy groups, and so there is no reason why the women who do Playback couldn't join a non-therapeutic theatre group (and indeed some women are in both); and secondly, the vast majority of women whom I encountered doing Playback are also therapists or counsellors of some type in their professional lives. Instead, I believe Playback offers a way for these women to reach and help more people in their community, which is their ultimate goal. These women want to help Haredi women, and improve the Haredi community, using their secular knowledge of psychology and therapeutic techniques.

Playback is an opportunity for Haredi women to enact agency. In the place of the women's-only performance space, women knit their secular therapeutic skills with the everyday lives of Haredi women, and help produce a new form of the scarf of Haredi identity. Women who attend these sessions can grasp these yarns of psychological healing, and knit them into their own internal identities, strengthening and bolstering themselves.

Playback performances are not only spaces for empathetic community building, like Esther's play; they also serve as spaces for safe critique, in which girls and women can express their frustration, anger, and struggles with certain strictures of Haredi society, like the girls at the dance school. The troupes with whom I conducted participant observation went to special efforts to create this space as both confidential and condoned. Yehudis always began by going around the room, and looking directly into every woman or girl's eyes, and insisting on waiting for everyone to hold eye contact with her before beginning. Like Rachel Factor, she believed that there was an intimacy and connection through the eyes. If anyone had their head down, she would call them out, though she did so kindly. After she made clear that the space of Playback was confidential and respectful, and that everyone kept each other's secrets, Sarah would step forward and tell the audience that they didn't 'just do this for fun. We have the blessings of many ravs to be with you here today, and the ravs require that we do this every time.' In this way, the women and the space which they create are clearly pious, because male religious leaders have endorsed these performances, and these practices of ensuring confidentiality. The patriarchy has invaded the women-only space, but only so that women may feel even more secure in their participation in a pious activity, allowing them agency to critique their world.

Many of the critiques that arose in Playback were around strict modest clothing standards. One young girl shared a story of a time she became hopelessly lost after dark in the Mea Shearim neighbourhood of Jerusalem. This is the most religious neighbourhood in Jerusalem;

it is completely Haredi, very Hasidic, and also home to the fringe extremist groups like *Neturei Karta* and *Lev Tahor*.

'I was wearing a red shirt,' she explains to the theatre troupe. 'I'm Litvish and we're not that strict about red, but I know that the people in Mea Shearim think red isn't *tsnius*, and I was afraid I was going to get shouted at, or, I don't know, maybe attacked or something. And I was really, really lost, and it took me like two hours to find my way home again.'

'What happened? How did you resolve it?' Yehudis asked gravely.

'I eventually made it back to Yaffa Street,' the girl said, her face so red by this point that it was nearly purple. 'Luckily no one really saw me, I think they were all still inside mostly.'

Yehudis nodded. She grabbed a red scarf from the prop box, wrapping it around her black shirt to turn it red. The other actresses fell into place around her, as the voices of fear.

'Oh no, oh no, I'm so lost, I don't know where I am, and the streets are so dark, and so narrow, and so dirty. Is that a street or just a doorway? Is that a person? Oh, no, it's just a pole. It's just a garbage can. Oh, my!! That cat scared me!' she jumped.

'Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear,' said the next. 'I'm in the *middle* of *Mea Shearim*, and I'm wearing *red! Why,* oh *why* did I wear *red* today of all days?'

A third fear moaned, 'What if someone sees me? What if one of the men is *angry* at me? What if they start shouting at me? What if they start throwing things at me? What if they want to hurt me because they think I'm not *tsnius* enough?'

As she watched, the girl drew her knees up to her chest in her chair, and buried her chin in her lap. Just her eyes peered over her knees as the drama unfolded before her. One of her friends put her arm around her.

'Look,' said Yehudis. 'Is that a light?'

Sarah ran across the front of the stage, and made the characteristic sound of the Jerusalem Light Rail doors opening.

‘Oh, look, it’s the train!’ said Yehudis, and runs towards the edge of the stage. ‘Oh, *baruch Hashem*, I am finally back at the train! I know how to get home!’

The troupe cheered, and everyone broke scene.

‘How did it feel to watch your story happen on stage?’ Yehudis asked.

The girl unfolded herself. ‘Like, it made me feel less silly for being scared,’ she said. ‘Like, I was really scared again, while I was watching you, and then I was really relieved, when you, I mean me, when you got out. I feel like I’m not as scared to walk by myself any more. Like, I know now I can find my way home again.’ In this moment, too, the audience felt her fear as well; in the togetherness created by watching the drama unfold on stage, she was no longer alone. Because they felt fear, she judged herself less for feeling fear.

Another girl brought her story of once being excluded from school for her clothing to the Playback troupe. She was sent home for wearing a skirt two inches too short. She expressed feelings of being singled out, and frustration at both the lost learning time and the inflexibility of the school. After her scene was performed, she thanked the Playback troupe, telling them she felt validated. The Playback troupe therefore filled two very important roles: they allowed and supported her critique of the school dress code and strict modesty standards, and they helped this student feel reinvested in her membership in the Haredi community. This is of no small importance; dress code violations are one of the principal reasons why girls are excluded from Haredi schools, and once a girl is excluded from school she is at risk of homelessness and other dangers, such as those described in Michal’s hypothetical situations in the previous chapter. They validated her critique of the focus on technicalities around modesty in schools, and buoyed her agency as a pious young woman who would rather learn than miss school.

Sometimes, there are more serious psychological or psychiatric issues that emerge in the Playback process. Sometimes, a Playback event will be the first time a person speaks about a

trauma; other times, they have had audience members in mental health crises, such as mania or psychosis. These are moments when it is fundamental that every member of the Playback troupe has therapeutic training. In these moments, the troupe mediates the situation for the audience, and uses emergency triage psychological techniques. Usually, one of the members then takes on the person's onward care, or refers them to psychiatric services for more serious care.

Yehudis runs a therapy practice out of a small office in the centre of Petach Tikvah, in a location which is both easily accessible to many Haredi communities in Bnei Brak, but also anonymous because it is a business area. She sees a wide range of clients, including both children and adults. She is one of several trusted counsellors in the community to help children who have been victims of sexual abuse; she also helps adults who are survivors of the same. Some of her clients are going through difficult divorces, others are struggling with being single long after the normal age of marriage. She has two psychology degrees, which she received from Haredi-only (and women-only) programs.

Another woman in Yehudis's Playback troupe, Chana, is a movement therapist. She only works with adult women, but her clients have similar struggles to those who visit Yehudis. Movement therapy is an unusual approach, but Chana says that it is especially useful in 'unblocking' her clients; often they have been unable to speak about their trauma, or articulate their emotions.

Chana presented me with examples, so that I could understand how movement therapy operates as a therapeutic method, having no familiarity with it. First, she told me about a woman who was undergoing infertility treatments, and was experiencing anxiety attacks, either because of the medications or the circumstances. Chana worked with her to improve her relationship with her body, and this in turn calmed her anxiety. Chana said the client told her, 'Now I appreciate what my body is doing. My body thinks there's been a change. Thank

you, body, for taking care of me. I appreciate this process. My body is my best friend, and it has always worked for me before.' In this case, movement therapy serves a similar purpose as the dance school; it helps women redefine their relationship with their body to conform to secular ideas of body familiarity, and integrates this into a new type of Haredi womanhood.

Chana offered another example. 'I had a woman who was in a bad marriage come to me,' she says. She practiced breathing with her: facing each other and matching up their breathing to be in sync. They moved on to mirroring; the women would move in ways to show how she felt, and Chana would move as a mirror, so she could see it reflected back.

'She stood, and went to the hall, and I'm with her and moving after her, and she opens the sliding door, and then freezes,' Chana told me. 'Then she moved out of it and came to talk to me. She said it was amazing for her because she wants to leave, and she opened the door, and the fear came flooding back. She realised it was a fear of being alone. It wasn't about the relationship. She said to me, "The relationship is over but I'm not ready to be alone." She wanted to get out her anger with me. I helped her do it through movement, and she really needed it. It's so different than talking it out.'

Much of *frum* therapeutic work highlights the limitations of language. An extraordinary proportion of *frum* therapists work with techniques that de-emphasise spoken words. Furthermore, these therapeutic approaches are often physical. In the standard Western therapeutic relationship, touch is taboo, yet for Chana, and sometimes for Yehudis, touch is fundamental to the process.

Chana offers a final example.

'I had a woman in with attachment issues,' she tells me. 'One thing we worked on was the endings. She found the end of the session hard. We practiced slowly letting go of each other's hands, with the understanding it was safe to stop, and to hold, when you hit a feeling. So like, for that type of thing, there's a lot of using space, and movement, and physicality.'

Chana takes a moment to explain some of her anecdotal findings from experience. 'I see a lot of emotional neglect,' she tells me sadly. 'There is definitely *more* from *frum* homes. Sometimes they are *ba'alei teshuvah*, but then it's more typical abuse.' Chana is critical of Haredi society in this moment. She clearly doesn't like what she is saying, but she knows it to be true from her experiences, and she wants to change this. She may not be able to stop it from happening, but she has a way of using her secular expertise to help Haredi women recover from these past wrongs.

'She had just told me some terrible things about her trauma,' Chana says, continuing this woman's story. 'And I was crying. She wasn't. I said to her, "I have the tears and you don't." She asked me, "Can I touch your tear and see that it's real?" And she reached out and touched the tear on my cheek. Later, she called me from home. She wanted to come back and take another tear home with her. And the next session, she cried.'

Chana's story is heartbreaking, but it also offers hope and a vision for the future of the Haredi community. She, Yehudis, and others like them are using their newly acquired secular expertise to change the Haredi community, and to create a vision for Haredi personhood and Haredi society that combines secular knowledge with Haredi values for the benefit of the community.

'Sometimes,' Yehudis tells me, 'it's a moment of, "Wow, I have feelings!" It's brave.'

The choice of therapeutic roles is in itself a form of critique; there is an acknowledgement within this choice that the community has troubles and trauma which need healing. These therapeutic roles act as gateways for women to re-knit other women. It is also a further example of the use of outside secular knowledge, combined with pious values and ethics, in order to benefit the Haredi community and perhaps change the community in a way that these women perceive to be an improvement. Women are using their agency as wage-earners, secular knowledge mediators, and pious beings to critique the society as it is at present and

transform it into something that is still Haredi but, in their eyes, and in the eyes of the community leaders who endorse them, improved.

Secular Incursions and Jewish Unity

Thus far, this chapter has focussed on elements of the secular which have been accepted into the Haredi community, and are welcomed as tools to benefit Haredi society. Not all secular incursions are welcome, however; the Haredim, despite trying to build a separate reality, are living in and part of modern Israel.

I was sharply reminded of this during dance rehearsals. One of the advanced lyrical choreographies was *Shir Hama'alos*, danced to Psalm 121 as sung by Kineret, a religious woman singer. In the middle of the psalm, during an instrumental interlude, small groups acted out scenes from daily life: one featured a gunman who pursued dancers fleeing in fear across the stage, another focussed on a woman weeping over the dead body of a loved one. The first time I witnessed these elements, I was shocked by the introduction of harsh images of real, brutal life in the midst of a deeply spiritual dance.

I realised the dance had been choreographed less than two years after a summer of rocket fire from Gaza; the same year, on the morning of the 18th of November, Kehilat B'nai Torah synagogue in the neighbourhood of Har Nof had been the site of the deadliest terror attack in Jerusalem since 2008. Har Nof is a Haredi neighbourhood with a significant Anglo population, and many families in the dance school live in Har Nof. While Haredim do not serve in the military (for the most part) and try not to participate in mainstream Israeli life, they are not spared from the realities of living in Israel, and the dangers that are associated with living in a country in conflict.

The arts have become a space to mediate these incursions, and to further offer therapeutic

opportunities. In the dance school, the girls in these scenes spared themselves no emotion; they felt the fear, anger, and sorrow that lurks in the background of their lives. Lizzi uses song to process her emotions around these challenges, and her audience processes them with her in performance together.

Jerusalem
Lizzi Serling

I heard the siren, I heard the screams
And time was racing just like a dream
And though I'd have it be another way, I hold my son in my arms and I say
I made it through today

I read the headlines and so did you
I prayed to G-d that it wasn't true
And though I'd have it be another way, the ones who read the paper stop and say
I made it through today

On misty mountains there sits a town
With golden air and a stony ground
And though we'd have it be another way we know that some don't get the chance to say
I made it through today
I made it through today
I made it through today, I made it through today, I made it through

Lizzi's song allows people to recognise their own fear and the commonality of each other's experiences in her music; she offers a moment of togetherness in the fear, and like the girls at the Playback performance, or the women at the play production, the feeling of togetherness makes the emotions less overwhelming. There is sorrow: 'we know that some don't get the chance to say I made it through today,' yet she allows space for the gratitude that they 'made it through today.'

Lizzi's music chiefly seeks to emphasise shared experiences and help women find strength through togetherness; much of the arts community is turning towards this goal, and included in that is the emphasis that all women's experiences as Haredim are equally as

valued as others. The arts have become a place to combat the prejudice which is discussed elsewhere in this project. The dance school hosts an incredible amount of diversity. There are African Americans, South Asians, Sephardim, and Ashkenazim at the school, which focuses on the welcome and acceptance of all Jews over all other considerations; Rachel Factor is herself a Japanese American who grew up in Hawai'i. Gurer Hasidic women dance holding hands with African American *ba'alos teshuvah*. Lizzi's concerts, which are always fully booked due to her popularity, reflect a similar diversity.

Kerry Bar-Cohn is similarly committed to this vision of unconditional acceptance of all Jewish women; whereas in-person activities like dance and concerts are somewhat limited by geography, she has taken to the internet to use art to create an unconditional community of Jewish women. She started a Facebook group called *Kol Isha: For Jewish Women and Girls ONLY*, where women are invited to post videos of themselves singing or performing, no matter how shy or unprofessional. Though it does conform to the prohibition of *kol isha*, she chose the title because she felt like the prohibition was, at its heart, negative and demeaning, and she wanted to transform it and 'turn it on its head.'

'I wanted to promote women's confidence, and be empowering,' she tells me late at night in her dining room in Beit Shemesh. 'I wanted a way for women to connect, a way for women to feel like they were a part of it. It's a play on *kol isha*, because it promotes the voice of women.'

She says she was frustrated by the feeling that so many creative Jewish women were isolated and unaware of each other's talent, and she wanted women to discover and celebrate each other.

'Jewish unity is important to me,' she says. 'I don't really care whether or not you're religious.'

At the time of the interview, there were just over five hundred followers of the Facebook

group; at the time of writing, there are over 7,000. ‘It speaks to the fact that it fills a need,’ Kerry says. I suggest to her that it also speaks to her energy and investment; she is a woman always in motion, and she brings boundless joy to her videos on the group. She shrugs that off, saying, ‘I do a lot of tone setting, deleting certain comments, things like that. I want it to be a place of positivity. My only hard and fast rule is no posting while driving.’

Since the interview, she and a few other women have taken more active roles as moderators and started enforcing strict no-advertising rules. Such is the nature of growing popularity.

‘I love the inclusivity, it’s definitely not just for *frum* women,’ says Kerry. ‘It’s about connecting creatively, connecting joyously. It’s also about the *safety* of a women’s-only space. We encourage and empower other women. It brings Jewish women together. There’s no faith connection, really, just that I want to use the skill bank I have to help the world.’

Kerry’s act is both a critique of the extreme interpretation of *kol isha* in the *frum* world, and an act of agency to create a society which she envisions as welcoming and inclusive. She wants to shape the future of her society, and promote Jewish women of all backgrounds. To her, being Haredi is incidental, and all Jewish women matter.

‘I want to be a good person, and do the right thing. That’s it,’ she says. ‘God gave me the gifts of being uninhibited, coordinated, and talented, and I have to use those things. Now, with *Kol Isha*, there’s a format, maybe in the future I can create a *Kol Isha* non-profit, and really help the world. There’s a limit to what I can do all by myself. To me, right now, it’s just about empowering women.’

She says there has been no resistance from the Haredi establishment, and no pushback from the community. She believes that anyone who knows about it would not have a problem with it, and those who would have a problem with it do not know about it. ‘They’re not on Facebook,’ she says with a wry smile.

‘Use Your Voice’

It’s night-time on *erev shabbos* [Thursday evening] in Jerusalem, and women are gathering in the Old City for a Be’er Mayim Chaim concert. The hall is packed. The concert sold out in advance. Some women have brought their daughters, or babies who are still breastfeeding. Seminary girls sit in groups together. Older women are dotted around. Some heads are covered in *sheitels*, others in *tichels*; one in a hat and one in a turban. There is every shade of skin colour imaginable in the room.

The trio take the stage to enthusiastic applause, and play tune after tune for the audience’s enjoyment. Later in the evening, Lizzi’s choir joins them on the stage: single girls and married women, *sheitels* and *tichels*, black and white and brown skin. Outside, the streets have slowly been emptying; it is time for their final song.

The hall is silent.

Serling gently strums an arpeggio chord.

‘Now please don’t you feel silenced,’ she sings, her voice floating on the air.

The women gaze at her. Liora and Miriam hold their bows, waiting to play.

‘Like you should be ashamed,’ Lizzi continues. She has everyone’s attention, now, and they are hanging on every word. ‘Of feeling something strongly…’ she pauses. ‘Or a feeling that can’t be named!’ She finishes the line lightly, high.

‘’Cause we puuuuuuuuuuuut,’ she sings, opening up on the vowel, letting the sound soar, ‘ourselves in boxes, but it’s we who hold the key.’ She is completely inside the emotion of the song, now, and the audience is feeling it with her. She has them, she has created *communitas*.

‘Let the words come pouring out of you, do you dare to be free?’

Lizzi’s song, ‘Use Your Voice,’ is the epitome of Haredi women’s pious agency in

critique, via the arts, in order to shape it and form a more perfect vision for the future. It critiques the downfalls of Haredi society while celebrating Haredi ethics and values, and imagining a future society that embraces certain secular ideologies insofar as they strengthen Haredi life.

Use Your Voice
Lizzi Serling

Now please don't you feel silenced, like you should be ashamed
Of feeling something strongly or a feeling that can't be named.
'Cause we put ourselves in boxes, but it's we who hold the key.
Let the words come pouring out of you, do you dare to be free?

We hide our inner thoughts sometimes for fear that we're alone
Or maybe you have tried to speak but then the words were gone
But I'm begging you, whether it be a *tefilla* or a cry,
Speak out your fears and hopes, sister, open up and try

To the girl who heard the rocket siren, use your voice, use your voice
To the widow who's so tired of crying, use your voice
To the woman who has felt the pain of birth, and to those who'll never know
Use your voice, oh use your voice, use your voice

To the girl who was her sister's mother, use your voice, use your voice
To the ones who learned to love each other, use your voice
To the ones who used to sing but lost themselves so very long ago
Use your voice, oh use your voice, use your voice

Now I've had my own journey, you too I have no doubt
And my only hope in singing is to bring some *simcha* out
'Cause we all are moving mountains with our fears and dreams and joys
We may not have lived each others' lives, but we can share one voice
So whatever you are feeling now be it gratitude to G-d
A hope for the future or a pain that's deep and raw
We've all felt those things in our own way, you are not alone
So even if it's just in song, make your feelings known

To the girl who heard the rocket siren, use your voice, use your voice
To the widow who's so tired of crying, use your voice
To the woman who has felt the pain of birth and to those who'll never know
Use your voice, oh use your voice, use your voice

Now sing it with me
I am not alone
I am not alone
I am not alone (repeated)
I'm not afraid to say I'm not okay, I am not alone

To the girl who heard the rocket siren, use your voice, use your voice
To the widow who's so tired of crying, use your voice
To the woman who has felt the pain of birth and to those who'll never know
Use your voice, oh use your voice, use your voice

To the girl who was her sister's mother, use your voice, use your voice
To the ones who learned to love each other, use your voice
To the ones who used to sing but lost themselves so very long ago
Use your voice, oh use your voice, use your voice

Lizzi's 'Use Your Voice' reflects the many themes of this chapter. She knits secular ideas into this song, while ultimately proffering a Haredi whole. 'Now please don't you feel silenced… We hide our inner thoughts sometimes for fear that we're alone,' mirrors the concerns which Lexie and Rachel are attempting to address in the dance school, especially the situation in which people feel they cannot openly speak about their struggles in the community. Like Esther in *The Mask She Wears*, Serling emphasises the shared experience of these struggles, and thus creates togetherness in the women's only space: 'To the woman who has felt the pain of birth and those who'll never know… 'Cause we all are moving mountains with our dreams and fears and joys, We may not have lived each other's lives, but we can share one voice… So whatever you are feeling now… a hope for the future or a pain that's deep and raw, we've all felt those things in our own way, you are not alone….' She echoes the criticiques of Yehudis, Chana, and the Playback artists and therapists when she mentions 'the girl who was her sister's mother… to the ones who learned to love each other… to the ones who used to sing but lost themselves so very long ago….' In addition to these critiques, Lizzi and the therapists also highlight how some circumstances have led women and girls to disconnect from their emotions, and they struggle to loosen these suppressions: '…like you should be ashamed, of feeling something strongly or a feeling that can't be named. 'Cause we

put ourselves in boxes… Or maybe you have tried to speak but then the words were gone.' While accepting that these unfortunate situations exist within her community, Lizzi also seeks to correct this, by creating the togetherness of this artistic women's only space, in which 'I am not alone,' is repeated over and over as almost a ritualistic mantra. Women are not alone because they have shared this with each other; women are also not alone because God is always with them. Throughout the song, Lizzi shows her ethical piety, like Ruth: 'But I'm begging you, whether it be a *tefilla* or a cry, speak out your fears and hopes, sister, open up and try… Now I've had my own journey, you too I have no doubt, and my only hope in singing is to bring some *simcha* out … So whatever you are feeling now be it gratitude to G-d,' all underscore Lizzi's identity as a pious and ethical Haredi woman; furthermore, because they carry this message it allows her audience to listen to her music without concern for compromising their own piety. Once piety has been established, she can safely make the critiques mentioned above. Lizzi further creates a feeling of togetherness through the familiar: 'To the woman who's felt the pain of birth…;' and, like the dance school, the shared trauma of living in Israel: 'To the girl who heard the rocket siren… to the widow who's so tired of crying.' Ultimately, this allows Lizzi's lyrics to take on the task of critique, and leads her to her goal of transforming women into people who are unafraid to 'use their voice.' The comparison between the title and refrain in the song, 'Use Your Voice,' and the *kol isha* prohibition is unavoidable. It seems to me to be an obvious point of critique— not necessarily of the prohibition itself, as Lizzi values it in its intention, but in the over-extension of it in women's lives. 'Now please don't you feel silenced, like you should be ashamed…' leads to Serling's ultimate imperative: '… but it's we who hold the key. Let the words come pouring out of you, do you dare to be free? … Use your voice, oh use your voice, use your voice.'[20]

[20] Lizzi also invests in a very Jewish idea of what it means to be 'free', and therefore further reveals her ethics as pious and Haredi. For further understandings of the Jewish concept of freedom, please see Sacks 2018.

Like the others, Lizzi imagines a world in which Haredi ethical womanhood is maintained without harming women, and she uses her art, and the women's only space of performance, to critique and strengthen the Haredi present for a better Haredi future.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have seen that critique is very much a part of religious life in the Haredi world. The arts space fosters this, by allowing women to create togetherness in which they can be agents of change. Haredi women's agency is pious; they inhabit pious forms of womanhood which invest in modesty, faith, and belief. Their agency is pious and therefore they can critique religious life, because they are not rejecting religion or Haredi ethics and values. Instead, their critiques are made in the effort of improving religious life for women and girls, so that they can 'fix the problems,' and create a better community for those who may otherwise wish to leave. In order to do this, they incorporate elements of secular knowledge and value systems into Haredi religious ethics. This is a knitting process in which women sometimes unpick and re-knit, as well as knitting afresh, the scarf of Haredi identity internally, and the scarf of Haredi society. They slip in yarn from the basket of secular values and knowledge, and use it to transform the scarf into a warmer and stronger fabric. Women use their agency to negotiate their Haredi ethics and values with secular knowledge and values, producing new forms of Haredi feminine identities.

Chapter Six: Feminism

The Haredi approach to a feminist movement is the consummate example of negotiating between religious ethics and secular values. Indeed, it is the natural extension of the types of agency discussed in the previous chapter. Haredi women have been exposed to the yarn of feminism; they select skeins from the basket which, in their view, strengthen and warm the Haredi scarf without making it no longer Haredi. They knit together religious ethics with secular feminist values. Mahmood cautions against misattributing 'feminism' to non-liberal religious women, for fear of creating a false concept of political consciousness (Mahmood 2005, 8). I would like to make it abundantly clear that I do not falsely attribute feminism to these Haredi women, rather, it is a label which they take upon themselves. Women have begun to organise around more formal forms of activism in the last decade, and the 'New Haredi Feminist Movement', as the activists call their movement, has caught attention outside the Haredi world as it has gained momentum (Eglash 2017, Littman 2019, Kraft 2020). Feminism implies a certain level of liberal normativity (Mahmood 2015, 10), and indeed, the Feminist Movement is representative of the acceptance of secular values; we have seen in past chapters that this is not unusual in the Haredi world. This chapter establishes that the prevalence of the acceptance of feminist attitudes is still low, but growing across all sectors of the Haredi community in Israel. This chapter also seeks to establish that it is possible and not contradictory to hold feminist values and a feminist identity while accepting, and indeed embracing, patriarchal religious hierarchy and authority. I will argue that Haredi feminism is straightforward, equal rights feminism which distinguishes between applying feminist ideology to secular aspects of Haredi life while preserving religious ethics which are not compatible with the feminist agenda. In this way, like so many other aspects of Haredi

life, Haredi feminism is a negotiation to absorb certain secular values which not compromising religious ethics.

This chapter also seeks to compare the Haredi Feminist Movement with other Feminist and Women's Movements, and differentiate what distinguishes this Feminist Movement from other activist movements. Of particular focus is the leadership of non-Ashkenazi women; nearly universally, they claim that their feminist activism would not have arisen had they not already felt discriminated against for their ethnicity. In that way, the movement represents intersectional interests of the dual strife of racism and women's inequality; but that is the limit of the intersectionality of this movement. The women of the Haredi Feminist Movement almost self-consciously avoid talking about the other forms of oppression which women may face, and the movement does not seek to redress other forms of discrimination. Finally, this chapter seeks to document the two most significant Israeli Haredi Feminist organisations, *Nivcharot* and *Ubizchutan*. While these documentations are of value in their own right simply as documentations, they also demonstrate the two different approaches which Haredi Feminists take; these in turn are reflective of themes which will be explored in Chapter Seven. *Ubizchutan* is the Haredi Women's Party founded by Ruth Colian, and she maintains purity of Haredi ethics, refusing to work with anyone or any organisation which is not Haredi, and insisting that Haredi values be applied to the country of Israel as a whole. *Nivcharot*, is an NGO that lobbies at the *Knesset* and conducts leadership programs for Haredi women. The women of *Nivcharot* cooperate with a wide range of organisations and leaders, both inside and outside the Haredi world. Ultimately, however, both groups share similar goals and agendas in their pursuit of equal rights for Haredi women.

I would also like to take this opportunity to clarify that I understand that the term 'feminism' itself carries a great deal of weighty intellectual baggage, but it is not my intention to engage directly with this term or the vast histories behind it. Rather, it is my goal

to understand it anthropologically; that is, how my interlocutors use and understand it, what purpose it serves them, and how it is part of the greater question of women's role in the changes in Haredi society today.

'At Least Those Women Aren't Having Any Children'

In the summer of 2013, I was a young and earnest researcher conducting fieldwork among the Hasidic communities of Jerusalem. It was a bit of a turbulent time— when is it not?— in the religious Jewish world of Jerusalem: *Neshot haKotel*, The Women of the Wall, were investing great vigor into their campaign to obtain a Torah scroll and use it at the Western Wall for women-only *minyan*s [quorum necessary for prayer]. Their activities had elicited responses from the rabbinical leaders in the Haredi community, and school girls from Haredi schools had been sent to fill the women's section at the Wall to capacity, effectively blocking *Neshot haKotel* from gaining access.

I was sitting in the dining area of a house in the Karliner community of Givat Ze'ev one day with two women, one middle-aged and one already a grandmother many times. A newspaper lay on the table, and the front page story concerned *Neshot haKotel*. Seeing the headline, the middle-aged woman shook her head, and said,

'These poor, misled women.'

Her mother nodded. 'They think they are doing right and they are so confused,' she agreed.

'The older ones are to blame,' said her daughter. 'They are leading these beautiful young Jewish girls into their madness.'

'What's this?' I ask.

'These women,' she points to the article. '*Nashim*… *neshot*… [Hebrew forms for

'women'] I won't even say it. They are so confused. If they just did what *Hashem* intended for them, they wouldn't feel the need to make such a ruckus.'

Her mother nods. 'It's a *balagan*, complete craziness. They're crazy women. I think they're lesbians? Or something? Something unnatural.'

She seems unsure, but she seems to think that they are somehow representing something outside the norm.

Her daughter says to me, 'If you haven't heard of them, I don't want to tell you too much about them. They are so unhealthy, so confused and twisted. It's better for you if you don't know, don't think about that stuff.'

Her mother smiles. 'Well, at least *those* women aren't having any children!'

They laugh, and the conversation moves on.

I did, in fact, know quite a bit about the *Neshot haKotel* at that time. I was simultaneously taking classes with one of the members, and she had invited me many times to join in the protests. This woman was not Haredi; she was a Modern Orthodox woman, with a degree in Talmud, and she lived in the Gush Etzion. Though I was tempted to join these ladies, I declined due to fears of my picture being snapped by a newspaper. Such a picture would completely destroy my ability to conduct research in places like the Karlin-Stolin community.

Feminist Orthodoxy had a long history in the Modern Orthodox and National Religious world by the time I was beginning my research project in 2013. Blu Greenberg's prediction that traditional Judaism would be unable to avoid the feminist encounter (Greenberg 1981, ix-xi) was proven to be the case; however, this was strongly resisted, like other secular movements, by the Haredi world. Like Greenberg, who founded the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, Modern Orthodox feminism has attempted to apply, to a certain extent, feminist theory to the practice of Judaism; movements like *Neshot haKotel* and the founding of *Yeshiva Maharat* have sought to gain women access to holy texts, and grant women

smicha. Even these things were not initially within the imagination of Greenberg, who suggested in her 1981 Preface: 'What position can we as committed Jews take toward feminism? What can we integrate, what must we reject? Where must we separate ourselves from mainstream feminism, and what are the pressure points in our tradition that, because we are women, we must locate? How and where ought the pressure to be applied so that tradition will neither discriminate nor close off certain parts to us? How can we become more responsible, fully equal members of a holy community? What claims do women have on tradition and Halakhah [sic] as the Jewish people move through the fourth millenium of their existence?' (Ibid., ix-x).

Indeed, Greenberg's early words may be more aptly applied to the current Haredi Feminist Movement; she promotes the process of integration and rejection of feminist ideology, and this is the approach which has been adopted by the women with whom I conducted research. While perspectives like those of the Karliner women endure, there is a widening acceptance of feminism and feminist ideology among women in the Haredi mainstream, as well as a proliferation of feminists in the New Middle Class. For my purposes, it is not relevant to situate these women's feminisms within the greater scholarship of feminist theory; rather, I seek to understand how they adopt feminist ideology within certain spheres of their life, and reject it in other areas, in order to create new ontologies. Their attitudes toward and relationship to feminist ideology is at the heart of my analysis. The feminism, even of the most radical, is tempered by a respect for and circumvention of *halacha*; women have adopted feminism around economic parity and bodily autonomy, but do not seek to expand women's roles and rights within the religious sphere. For the women who were my interlocutors, the religion remains unassailable, while feminist values are applied to secular aspects of life. This has meant that women use their religious knowledge, which has improved alongside improvements in secular education, to question the extent to

which *Da'as Torah* and religious authority can be applied, such as in the case of the removal of images of women and girls. Yet women do not tend to seek to overthrow the patriarchal structure of their homes or communities, and accept their husbands' authority, purely by virtue of his wealth of knowledge and learning.

The Patriarchy is OK by Me

Male rabbinical authority is a fact of Haredi life; even in the women-only space of performing arts, we see the primacy of the rabbis.

'It was such a huge thing when the Rav gave me this *chug*,' Rachel Factor told me. She is referring to the rabbi who is the head of the *Beis Yaakov* where she holds dance classes. 'It was like I was *in*. With *this* rav, at *this* school, like, everyone knew I was ok.'

In Playback Theatre, the mention of 'ravs' and the fact that they supervise the Playback troupe holds gravitas for audiences: at seminaries, the girls grow more serious and sit up a little straighter, and in more mature audiences, nods of encouragement greet these announcements. *The Mask She Wears* script was supervised by a multitude of rabbis, who read the script as Esther Goldman developed it, some of whom are listed on the posters, DVD case, and in the playbill. 'I am deeply grateful to the rabbanim and rebbetzins, including R' Yitchak Breitowitz, R' Zev Leff, and R' Dovid Orlofsky, who took time out of their busy schedules to review the script and provide hadracha [rabbinic rulings or allowances, plural of *heter*] on the suitability and accuracy of the situations portrayed in it. I owe a tremendous hakaras hatov ['recognising the good'] to Rebbetzin Rena Tarshish for providing guidance and encouragement from the genesis of the initial idea through the final product,' Esther's Director's Note reads in the playbill.

However, the play also offers a subtle critique of certain patriarchal structures in Haredi

society through Shani's story. In one of the scenes in which Shani's difficulties at home are revealed, Shani is trying to wake her husband, Avi, so that he will be able to 'make the last *shacharis* [morning prayer] in the *shtiebel* [a small room used for prayer].' (Goldman 2016, scene 6) Avi, whose voice we hear from an off-stage recording, shouts at Shani. She approaches the bedroom door again, and says,

'*Seder* [a period of learning at *yeshiva*] already started, Avi.'

Avi: 'Who died and made you my *mashgiach* [kosher supervisor]?!?'

Shani: '*Chas v'shalom*!'

Avi: 'Then stop acting like one!'

Shani dithers, and then tells Avi that the cleaning lady is coming, and he can't be alone with her.

Avi: 'I'm in bed! Just tell her not to come in here!'

Shani's Thought Shadow: 'Um… *yichud* [literally 'seclusion,' refers to the *halacha* prohibiting an unmarried man and woman from being alone together, lest they commit adultery]?'

Shani: 'What about *yichud*?'

Avi: 'According to the [unclear], it's ok as long as you're in the city, you'll be *shomer ani* [the keeper of me]. [Unintelligible Hebrew]. And she should leave the door open! . . . It's fine.'

Shani's Thought Shadow: 'Um, I never heard of a *heter* [rabbinic allowance] like that before.'

But Shani does not question Avi on this claim and changes the topic. (Ibid.)

In this exchange, we see the dysfunction of Shani's marriage and the difficult position in which she finds herself as a result of patriarchal authority within Haredi society. Shani, as a Haredi woman, has received enough religious education to know what is acceptable under the

Haredi value system; however, because the husband is the authority on religious matters in a Haredi home, she cannot debate with Avi beyond a certain point on religious matters in the household. Her interpretation is the one that conforms to Haredi ethics, but she is subject to the authority of her husband, despite his current failure to behave according to Haredi ethical personhood. Shani's agency is limited in matters of religious knowledge, and though she is in fact the pious one in this exchange, in order to remain pious by obeying her husband, she must allow her house to become a space where Haredi values are not upheld. In this way, Shani's story becomes a critique of the structures of patriarchy within Haredi society, which limit Shani's agency to maintain a pious home, which is integral to her formation of Haredi ethical womanhood.

While this is so, I feel it is unlikely that Esther wrote this scene with the purpose of critiquing the patriarchal systems; rather, she was more likely trying to illustrate how far Avi had fallen. Esther is not necessarily among the women who would call themselves Haredi Feminists; her goals in her creative process is to help women empathise with each other, develop women's thoughtfulness and sensitivity, and help women realise that many others share their struggles.

And yet, of those women who do proudly bear the label of 'Feminist,' many of them are quite comfortable with the maintenance of male religious authority, both in the home and in the greater social sphere. Indeed, it is not unusual for non-liberal religious women to take critical stances in certain areas of their lives while investing in the religious status quo simultaneously (Rinaldo 2014, 828 & 843).

'Men are in charge,' says Tovah, frowning. 'In the house, in my house, that is completely ok. I don't know, it's a challenge as feminist. I'm ok with it at home because my husband knows more. He learns, and so he knows more about the *halacha* and stuff. I don't know, it's frightening that some women wouldn't have control of their own bodies, in some parts of the

community. I know it's a sort of contradiction, but I'm ok with it at home. I'm ok with living with the contradictions.'

Tovah tells me that the recent #metoo movement had a real effect on her— this conversation occurred in the autumn of 2018.

'How do I rationalise the Me Too Movement as a Haredi woman?' she says. 'How do you have a voice? Is it appropriate?'

Despite the general resistance to technology within the Haredi world, there were definite reverberations of #metoo felt around the Haredi world.

'*Frum* women grow up sheltered, but women who are modern enough have heard about it,' she says. 'I don't like how the religious community can sometimes hide behind their religiousness. *Frum* women have taken some of the #metoo stuff on, too.'

She says she remembers growing up, the men around her made sexist jokes on a regular basis, but it never occurred to her not to accept it. She says she's pleased that by growing up in the Haredi community in Jerusalem, her daughters have never experienced harassment. In this way, she reframes Haredi society as better for women, while straightforward in its patriarchy.

'But now, *frum* women are coming forward, and there are more horror stories coming out about how women are not being properly serviced by the rav and the community,' she says. 'Feminism is still a bad word in the Haredi world, but there's beginning to be a division even on that. People are starting to say, "Let's suss out the definition."'

Tovah thinks of herself as a feminist; while she espouses feminist beliefs, she does not participate in any of the activist organisations connected to feminism, like *Nivcharot* or *Chochmat Nashim*. She is one of the many quiet, at-home Haredi feminists.

'I'm a closet Haredi feminist,' Batsheva tells me with a grin while we sit on her living room rug, playing with her youngest baby. 'My out-of-the-box ideals are what got me here in

the first place.'

Batsheva and Tovah share similar concerns: they worry about women's health, the lack of services within the community to support women, the erasure of images of women, and the wage disparity for women in the community, which effectively holds families in poverty, because women remain the chief earners.

Some Haredi feminists become independent activists, taking action because they feel they have no other choice, whether or not they are part of activist organisations. Such is the case for Kerry Bar-Cohn, founder of the Kol Isha Facebook group. She lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh, which has been the site of some of the most well-known controversies surrounding the removal of images of women, and the self-policing of strict modesty standards.

'*Yes*,' she says to me vehemently, 'I am a feminist!'

She tells me about the moment she chose to act upon her feminist sentiments, when the situation in Beit Shemesh had finally reached a climax for her. Her home is less than a block away from the infamous billboard advertising construction of an old-age nursing home; the wall the length of the construction site was an advertisement for the future building. There was only one problem: the pictures only showed elderly men.

'I went out and I stuck pictures of the Golden Girls on the ad,' she tells me with a grin.

'Then I made a sign, with Gal Gadot, in her Wonder woman costume and cape,' she says. 'It said "Have a WONDERful Shabbat" at the bottom!'

She also created posters that were slightly more on the nose, and read: 'Not Showing Women's Faces Hurts Them Economically and Pushes Them Into Poverty.'

'I believe women need an equal stake in society,' Kerry tells me. 'There should be equality in pay, and in other things.'

When I ask her how her feminism matches with her religious identity, she says, 'Borders can be liberating. Look at Kol Isha. So many women are thriving because it's only for

women. It's just about empowering women.'

Kerry understands how the goals of feminism and the values of religious life can fit together, and work in concert to create a type of Haredi life that is safer and more secure for women. She sees a Haredi future that is feminist and yet still Haredi. This is evident in her activism; none of what she does contravenes Haredi ethics. She wishes people a wonderful shabbat, and uses humour and posters to make a point. Posters are one of the most universal forms of communication in the Haredi world; in every Haredi area in Israel, the streets are plastered with posters advertising special services, a yahrzeit, public education, or community information. Kerry's posters join the rest, with a woman-centric message and image. She integrates secular culture and knowledge with Haredi values, showing Gadot and the Golden Girls in images that generally conform to Haredi standards of modest dress, but refuses to remove women from the visual culture of Haredi life.

Not all women can envision such a future. One woman, whom I will keep entirely anonymous, put her head in her hands one night as we talked in her Beit Shemesh kitchen. We had been discussing the friction in Beit Shemesh, and how she felt about living in a community where people have become so aggressive about modesty standards.

'I don't know!' she said into her hands, her voice almost a sob. 'I don't even want to be Haredi anymore!'

Her head came up sharply. She appeared shocked at her own words.

'No, hang on, I don't mean that,' she said to me, holding her hand out in a 'stop' signal. 'No, maybe I do. I don't know. It's just so *hard.*'

It is not surprising that many women also continue to actively reject the title of 'feminist' within the Haredi community.

Batya, who is *frum* from birth and living in Modi'in Illit, told me, 'I wouldn't use the word, because behind that word I'm seeing a woman who is fighting to be like a man in order

to have worth. But I am a *true* feminist. I'm all about celebrating womanhood. I celebrate my womanhood by walking down the street, and saying, "This is my body." I watch these videos on LinkedIn, with women who are all made-up and wearing low-cut shirts, and I think, "What are you valuing?" It's such an ironic outcome of feminism. Women treat themselves in a very trashy way.'

I ask her if she has heard of Ruth Colian, and the Haredi women's party which Ruth started, called *Ubizchutan*, which loosely translates to, 'and to the merit of women.'

'Ugh, no, but I'm already turned off to it,' she says. 'Just that name: *ubizchutan*! Like, what's the point? It feels denigrating. It feels like women who feel their worth is by doing what men do. I'm a woman. I'm way past that.'

Batya's reaction is far more typical of the majority of Haredi women with whom I spoke. A distaste for the label remains, yet women have a fairly sophisticated pro-woman ideology, which is reminiscent of Second Wave Feminism, as Kaufman suggested in her work on *ba'alos teshuvah* (1993, 145). There is not a feeling of anti-feminism so much as a distaste for the perception of what feminism represents to the Haredi community. It is perceived as anti-man, or as wanting a woman to become a man, like Batya suggests. As more women become more comfortable taking on the identity and ideology of feminism within Haredi society, these perceptions are slowly changing, and this will allow less taboo to be associated with the idea of being an Haredi feminist in the future. The yarn of feminism is gently wending its way into the greater scarf of Haredi society, and it is not being cut out so vigorously as it may have been in the past. Rather, some traces are being left behind, and changing the fabric of Haredi society.

The Advent of Haredi Feminism

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the denouement of increasing stringency was coming to fruition. Women had high levels of secular education, while men had the lowest levels of secular education since the Second World War. The focus on *yeshiva* study had created a strange form of role reversal, in which men had taken on large portions of domestic duties while women worked outside the home, but were still expected to be authoritative heads of their households.

'The whole issue of Haredi feminism is obviously a result of— You sent us like to study in academia, to study and to work, and the men stayed at home,' says Michal. 'That also changed the role division at home. Like you know, you walk around Bnei Brak and El'ad and see the *yeshiva* students. Who takes the kids to school in the morning? It's the husbands. [A rabbi] says, "What have we come to, *yeshiva* students cooking for Shabbat?" It obviously mixed everything up.'

Michal had wanted to be a veterinarian while she was in high school; after discouragement from her school counsellor, she ultimately was one of the first Haredi women to pursue a certificate in computer science, which is now an extremely popular choice for women. Michal works outside the home in the secular world; work outside the community tends to present opportunities which open the door to women's involvement in leadership or activism. Some people have simply come to activism naturally. Esti Shushan's activism began before she even left working in the Haredi world. One of her first jobs was writing for *Mishpacha* [Family] *Magazine*, one of the most widely circulated Haredi publications.

'My mother always told me that I have *chutzpah*,' Esti says. 'I wanted to write in the politics section. It's not the women's paper.' *Mishpacha* has separate sections for women, men, and children; generally, women and men write for women, whereas only men write for men. 'Because in the women's paper you write like about recipes, and about education for

your children, and about how to decorate the table, and all of that stuff, and this sort of stuff never interested me. So, I wanted to write in the men's place, and I have the skills to do that, and the editor knew that before I started. But he said, if you want to be taken seriously, you have to hide the fact that you are a woman. It was like an issue that we discussed, and we decided what name under which I will write. So, he decided to hide my first name, and all the time I wrote there, it was under [Aleph] Shushan, like my initial. With the aleph, they don't know if it's Avraham or Esther. I wrote for *Mishpacha* for about two years, and that was enough for me. Not because of the fact that I had to hide my gender identity, that was not the thing. The thing is, the Haredi media is like, they are a part of the establishment, and they serve the Haredi establishment, and you have to work like a pen for hire. You cannot write what you want to write. And I always had issues that I deeply cared about and that I wanted to write about, I want to criticise— when I am a publicist, I have issues that I want to talk about, and in this place [*Mishpacha Magazine*] a lot of the issues that I wrote, they didn't want to publish them. Because it is like criticism of the system. I knew the borders [boundaries], and I felt like I could not live with it. It's like *tzviut*, *tzvuah*. Hypocrisy.'

Esti left and started working in an advertising agency, outside of the Haredi community. This begs the question, what comes first? Dissatisfaction with the Haredi establishment, or working outside the community? Do the Haredi women who work outside the community do so for a reason, even unvoiced? Or do they begin to work outside the Haredi community, and then come across secular ideologies which engender discontent? It is likely a mixture of many of these influences.

Esti's nonconformist attitudes extended into her personal life choices as well. 'At about twenty-six I had my third, no, fourth child. And then I understood I had to stop. To relax. Because all the time I always asked the rabbi to give me, like, permission to stop to give birth, to— not to have the children all one after one, to rest after the fourth child was born. I

told my husband that we are not going to ask anybody about our decision, and now, we're going to stop.'

While Esti's decision to stop having children is clearly brave, and part of her '*chutzpah*', her gutsiness, the method she chose is not unusual. Rather than ask the rabbi, only to be told no, Esti chooses instead not to ask. Kasstan's discussion of vaccination decision-making in the Haredi community of Manchester, England, discussed this same technique: if someone knows the rabbi's answer will not be the answer they want, then they simply do not ask the rabbi for an opinion (Kasstan 2019, chap. 2, ePub). Esti's description of her approach, 'I told my husband', also reveals the inner workings of household authority, which is similar to other patriarchal religious communities (Abu-Lughod 1993, Mahmood 2005), in which, despite patriarchal authority, husbands will yield to their wives' most adamant convictions.

These acts of resistance and non-conformist choices existed within the Haredi world as stringencies grew; as discussed in the previous chapter, they are a fundamental part of the making of Haredi society. Until around 2010, Haredim who questioned Haredi authority, or disagreed with the status quo, did so in isolation, often assuming they were the only people who felt that way. The yarns of secularism which women had wound into the scarves of their identities inevitably led to the introduction of feminist skeins before long. But it was only when women encountered other women who had accepted and created similar changes that this became a force within Haredi society. Togetherness, the community of other women, was what shifted these changes from the individual to the social.

'Before the internet came, if you had a problem with something, you might think that you are crazy,' Esti tells me. 'Something is wrong with you, because nobody talks about it. After the internet came, the thing that happened was — I think a significant thing that happened was there were a lot of [online] forums, Haredi forums— this was a significant step for the Haredi community. This was about ten or twelve years ago,' she says, in March of 2019.

Esti's description hearkens to the critiques in Chapter Five, the words of the dance teachers and of Esther. There continues to be an over-arching sense that problems are hidden in the Haredi community; there is emphasis on maintaining appearances, and preserving reputations, both of individuals and the community, above all else. The subtle critiques and agency in everyday life begin to break these barriers down, as discussed in the last chapter, in order to improve the community. Members of the New Haredi Middle Class, the New Haredi Feminists, and other leaders have more recently turned to activism to address these issues and pursue change. Those who have the opportunities and education to gain perspective on their community, those with 'one foot in and one foot out,' like Michal said, have turned to secular models of change-making in order to help the Haredi community.

'But you have to understand that women are still – I work, but think that – not most [women work], because most of the Haredi women are in a terrible condition,' Michal tells me from her vantage point as insider and outsider. 'They're paid low wages, their horizon is non-existent, and they have ten children and poverty and everything. But there are still the 10% who can already be CEOs of companies…, but then— I can't be in politics? And it's also in the religious sphere— I can't be in the synagogue? It just becomes stupid. It becomes abnormal, the discrepancy.'

Michal suggests that the minority of women who have secular education and economic opportunity are naturally seeking more meaningful forms of leadership within the Haredi world. They have the perspective to be able to question the edicts of the rabbis and the prohibitions of the establishment. Furthermore, they are acutely aware of the situation which the majority of Haredi women face: poverty, many children, and no representatives to advocate for them. Therefore, Haredi women with opportunity and advantage have naturally sought to become advocates and leaders for women's rights in the Haredi world. It is a dangerous choice, as I will discuss below, which is why the numbers of activists remain low.

It is also an intersectional choice, which is driven by multiple aspects of women's identities, as is evidenced by the high percentage of Sephardi women who are activists and identify as Haredi Feminists.

'As the "other," that's one more reason for my politicism,' Esti says. 'As a Mizrahi girl, I always see around me the racism. That's something that I understand from a very young age. I understand that there are two classes, and I am not in the right class. That's something that I understand very, very well. Since I was very young. And all of those kinds of things, it's not something you can… discuss.'

Esti ultimately founded the organisation *Nivcharot*, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Ruth Colian similarly feels that her Sephardi identity is entwined with her women's rights activism.

'When I went there [to the *Beis Yaakov*] to take the [book] list, I saw a Sephardi mom with her two daughters,' Ruth tells me, concluding her story of her fight to get her daughter access to the Ashkenazi school, as described in multiple previous chapters. 'She and her girls were Haredi, they had *huge* modesty. And this mom was crying to the principal, and saying, "You don't have shame! You send them to [the state run national religious school]! No one religious goes to school there!" She left, and I went in. And I said, "How can the *Shechinah* [the female in-dwelling of God] be here if this school is built on the tears of mothers?"

'I spoke to my friend, and she said, "Ruth, listen. This is the best school for your daughter. She can go to the best high school after it. You just leave her there, that's it."

'I said, "Ok," but I promised to myself that I would not forget this mom. And I promised myself, then, that some way, somehow, in the future when I'm in a position where I have the opportunity to fight for the Sephardi moms, I will do it.'

Ruth gradually took on more advocacy roles within the Sephardi Haredi community, including voluntary advocacy within the courts and the Knesset, and this journey eventually

led her to found *Ubizchutan*.

The question remains why Esti and Ruth turned to feminist activism, as opposed to anti-racist activism. Lavie suggests that Mizrahi women's agency is almost impossibly curtailed by the necessity of proving their Jewishness, as opposed to their Arabness, and the Zionist demands on their identity structure (Lavie 2018). Mizrahi women are compelled to continuously prove their Zionist loyalty (Ibid., 24), thus rendering them incapable of critiquing the government bureaucracy (Ibid., 26-27). They are too busy proving themselves to be worthy of citizenship by supporting the saviour narrative of the State to be able to separately criticise the State's oppression. In the Haredi context, the Zionist narrative is de-emphasised, but the status of non-Ashkenazim is even more precarious within the community. The prejudice and discrimination are even more blatant in the Haredi world, and are often openly condoned by Ashkenazi leaders. Therefore, perhaps it is safer to approach inequality through feminist activism, where there are Ashkenazi allies like Michal. Perhaps, too, this is a way of stressing integration and participation, as opposed to stressing difference (Mizrachi et al. 2012, 438). The Haredi Feminist Movement is not intersectional[21]; it does not attempt to seek redress for inequalities women face as a result of other parts of their identity which are not gender. Rather, by seeking equal-rights feminist change for all Haredi women, the feminists are implicitly making change for non-Ashkenazi women, as they are perhaps disproportionately affected by the problems facing women in Haredi society.

Ultimately, the seeds of the Haredi Feminist Movement were sewn through the natural processes of a community which increasingly relied on women's education for survival, while simultaneously restricting the choices and opportunities for women. Like other feminist movements, the Haredi feminist movement cannot be understood in isolation from race,

[21] Goodman et al. 2020 define intersectionality as 'the process by which various socially and culturally constructed categories of discrimination interact on multiple levels to maintain systemic, almost caste-like social inequalities for many' (Goodman et al. 2020, 235).

ethnicity, and class. It is, however, not a movement which seeks to destroy Haredi society, but rather looks to negotiate Haredi society in ways that support women, and balances secular feminist values with the ethics of Haredi Judaism.

Ubizchutan

In the years since her fight to have her daughter admitted to *Beis Yaakov*, Ruth's activism had increased. She had also studied law at one of the Haredi campuses; she is now completing her internship at the Federal courts in Tel Aviv. As she grew in confidence, Ruth found herself advocating on behalf of women in her community more and more frequently.

'[When I was fighting to get my daughter in the school] this was the first time I realised that Shas was not serving me,' Ruth says. 'They're not helping me, and they actually don't care about me.

'The second time was when there was a woman involved in a car accident, and some people died, unfortunately. But she was pregnant, and she had babies who were nine or ten years old. And the court said that she needed to go to jail. And she appealed to the *mechozi* [regional] court and to the Supreme Court and she was rejected. And I saw her in the media and in Channel Ten. And I called her lawyer asking if she needs help because she intended to go to jail with her baby, [and bring her children to jail]. So I told her I could help, and I went with her and her husband to the *Knesset*. … It made me understand that the most significant decisions in Israel [are made] in the *Knesset*. That was one conclusion from this trip.'

Ruth became a natural leader within the Sephardi Haredi community. Her advocacy on behalf of other women ultimately put her in a role of mediator between the Haredi world and the secular state. When her work brought her to the *Knesset*, and she saw the machine of the government at work, it planted the seed in her mind that Haredi women needed representation

within the state.

'The other conclusion was— so the MKs can sign the document which goes to the president so he can pardon her. The first was an Arab MK, and then another Arab MK said he would, and then a non-religious MK, and then a woman— and only Shas was not [saying they would sign], and we could not see them. So, I vote every election for Shas, and I want to see them, my party, too, in this *shlichut* [commission].'

Ruth organised a petition for a pardon on behalf of the woman. This petition was then sent to the President, who would hopefully grant the pardon. Ruth was outraged that while she voted for Shas, the Shas Member of *Knesset* (MK) chose not sign the document of support for the Sephardi Haredi woman's pardon. She voted for Shas because Shas is supposed to represent the interests of the religious Sephardim, and she became frustrated that they were not doing so.

'And then I went to Eli Yishai's office— he was the head of Shas at that time,' Ruth continues. 'And so I went into his office, and I saw him. He was sitting next to the table, and there were three men standing close to him. I went up to him and said hello, and I said, "Look, I am a Haredi woman. I am helping a woman, she is Haredi, she is really not in a good situation…." and I started to explain. And suddenly all three men who were standing there next to him said, "How can you speak without waiting in the line? You don't see that there is a line? How do you dare to speak? Why are you pushing?"'

Ruth said, '"You said hello to me, and you welcomed me, and you were quiet, all three of you."

'So I said, "OK, I'm sorry." … I left, and once I was outside, I was like, "Whoa, what's happened? How can you have humility before God if people have to stand in line to talk to you?" He could see me… [and he] knows that I am voting for [Shas],… and you just sit there and do nothing? You see a Jewish woman, and three men shouting at her, and you don't

say, OK, calm down, maybe she made a mistake? How can he have humility in front of God if he doesn't get up and stop them from shaming me? And he was the guy I was voting for every election.

'This, together with what I had been through with my daughter, I came to the conclusion that, OK, Haredi women don't have anybody, don't have any official to go to when they need help. And the rumour had wings [Israeli expression, meaning the rumour spread], that I had successfully registered my daughter [for the *Beis Yaakov*]. Another woman, and another, came to me and asked me to help them. And I realised that there was [no one to whom Haredi women could address their concerns], and no one to be for them.'

Ruth was outraged by the way in which she was disrespected by the Eli Yishai, the man who was the head of the Shas party at that time. Like the Minister for Education before, he treated Ruth with the same destain and outrage, and transformed her forthrightness into an inappropriate brazenness. However, Eli Yishai is a Sephardi man, who is supposed to represent the interests of Sephardi women and men in the Haredi world. Ruth felt it was indicative of a general lack of respect within Shas, both for the struggles of Sephardi Haredim, and for women. She decided to take a more active role in representing the interests of Haredi women within the greater secular machine of the state, which she was coming to recognise for its power.

'And then [first] I decided to run for the city council election,' Ruth explains. 'And then the representative of Shas said, "Why are you running? You maybe won't succeed. And if you're not going to succeed, then you're taking votes from other parties" — and he means from Shas.

'So I said to him, "Ok, no problem, let me run with you."

'He said, "No, it's against *halacha*."

'"But the Rav Bar Dani says it is ok."

‘So he says, “Ok, let’s go see Rav Bar Dani,” because Rav Bar Dani is in the rabbinical council of Shas.’

However, Shas continuously delayed the meeting, first asking her to wait a week, and then two, and then telling her to wait until after the holidays, which meant waiting nearly a month. Eventually, she realised she was running out of time to enter the election. She attempted to collect signatures for a petition to the municipal election committee, but they ultimately denied her request.

‘I just stood and cried in the street, I just felt so cheated, like they cheated me! …I told [my friend], “I really feel like I could make a change!”’

Ruth ultimately chose to bring a lawsuit against Shas for discrimination against women. It was her attorney who suggested that she make her own party. When the supreme court initially ruled against her, she decided it was time to create a new political party.

‘When I was rejected by the court, I decided that if I could not use the legal system, I would try the political system,’ Ruth says.

‘I sat on my bed, and I begged “Oh, God, tell me what to do? What to do?”’ Ruth tells me. ‘And I thought, maybe one day, Sheryl Sandberg will read [about me] and it’s very important that she knows that I understand what I have to do. Because I [received] threats against making my Haredi women’s party.’ Ruth was scared, she says.

‘And on the other [hand], it has to be done!’ she continues with vehemence. ‘There is no other option. And there was nobody who could do it for many years. And I was at a *tzomet* [crossroads]. And then I remembered the sentence that I read in *Lean In*, she says think of what is the most frightening thing that you are afraid to do, and go out and do it! And this made me feel like I could do it.’

Ruth says that reading Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In* was one of the biggest influences in her life. Ruth, a Haredi Sephardi *ba’alas teshuvah*, reads a secular, feminist (if problematically

so) memoir, and gradually takes on more and more of a secular approach to resistance within the Haredi world. She becomes an activist; then she becomes a law student, and has now just become a lawyer; and finally she becomes a politician. She is Haredi, but she is secularised in her activism.

'So I did it, I made *Ubizchutan*,' Ruth says with a grin, 'but I didn't have a budget. And you need 45,000 shekels to start a party, and I don't have any shekels! So I started calling other political parties, seeing if I could [attach my ticket to theirs]. No one said yes, and there were parties that just hung up on me. I called thirteen or fourteen parties, and they all said no. And then the *La'or* party, the New Wave party, which is run by Dr. Yaakov Hisdai, … — it was my last option. … I begged him on the phone…. I told him he was my last chance. He said he had to ask his wife, and see what she thought. … [The next day he called me and said] that his wife liked the idea! And so we met, and I signed. I didn't have money, a budget [for a campaign], for a press conference.'

Ruth's next challenge was in getting publicity; she ultimately held a press conference through cooperation with the Zionists of America, but she was struggling to reach Haredi women. This is evident by how few women with whom I conducted research had ultimately heard of *Ubizchutan*. Under Israeli election law, she was permitted to advertise for free within the media; however, the two major Haredi newspapers in Israel refused to publish her advertisements. She petitioned the election regulator, a Supreme Court judge, for enforcement of her rights, but he rejected her claim, suggesting she instead file a civil suit. She brought a civil lawsuit first to the *Shalom* courts, the small courts in Israel, but they then sent her to the *Mechozi* courts. The regional court ultimately ruled in her favour, but it was a victory in name only. The ruling was handed down less than an hour before the beginning of *shabbat*, and the papers therefore could not print her advertisements in time. The election was on Monday, and the papers for Sunday had already been printed. Eventually, the papers also

appealed the decision to the Supreme court, and the decision was overturned. The right of the papers to reject her advertisement was upheld.

Ruth's party *Ubizchutan* ultimately received only a few thousand votes in the 2015 election, and she did not receive a seat in the Kinesset. Though she has not run again since, she tells me that the party is not dead.

'I had to press pause because I'm in my court internship,' she tells me. 'I'm not allowed to show my political ideas while I work for the court. But when I'm done at the court, I am back to *Ubizchutan*.'

Ruth's fight may not have had much success yet, but it is representative of the growing willingness of feminist activists within the Haredi world to use secular and state apparatuses to achieve their goals. In the simplest terms, someone needed to be first, and Ruth decided that she would be the first: the first to stand up to the male party leadership, the first to found a party, the first to try and run for a seat in the *Knesset* within the Haredi world. Ruth would not have been the first Haredi woman in the *Knesset* had she won; that honour lies with Tzvia Greenfeld, a Haredi woman who held a seat with the left-wing Meretz party in 2008. Greenfeld, however, has more in common with Michal Tchernovitsky, whose political views will be discussed in Chapter Seven. Ruth is the first Haredi woman to run for the *Knesset* on a ticket that reflects Haredi values and ethics. Loyalty and adherence to Haredi ethics is central to Ruth's perspective and approach, which I will discuss further below.

Nivcharot

While Ruth was battling for the rights and representation of Haredi women in the Kinesset, Esti Shushan was undergoing a similar transformation along a parallel path.

'I just want you to understand what are the triggers, and what happened to me, to turn me

from being a Haredi mainstream good wife and woman, now into a feminist,' Esti tells me. 'There are people who are saying that I'm a radical feminist. I want you to understand it, what happened. You have to understand the process that happened in the Haredi community.'

Esti and I are meeting in a café in Petach Tikvah. She tells me that she often works in this cafe; it is Kosher, but there are no other Haredim anywhere near. It is located in a mixed commercial and industrial area, and was somewhat challenging for me to find. I wonder if she chooses it for its anonymity; certainly, from what she tells me, anonymity is necessary for much of the work she does, if not for herself, then for others.

'It was a [chat room] named Hyde Park,' Esti explains. She says it draws inspiration from Speakers' Corner. '[In London] all the people come and shout their opinions. It's like a virtual platform in Israel. There were a lot of forums about a lot of issues, but in this platform, the interesting thing was that everyone wrote under nicknames. It's not like in Facebook where everybody sees you and knows your identity. It's, like, anonymous. And after those anonymous nicknames, people wrote everything that was in their hearts.'

Internet use in general is discouraged within the Haredi community, but like all things verboten anywhere, the use of the internet is naturally widespread in the Haredi world. In 2013 when I began research, nearly everyone had 'Kosher phones', which both had limited data capability, and also offered cheap plans for weekdays, with surcharges for use on the sabbath. I kept my Kosher phone for the duration of my various field trips; by the end of 2018, it was woefully out of date. By then, everyone in the Haredi world had 'Kosher Smartphones,' which were smartphones that blocked certain types of social media and internet browsing. Everyone I met had their teenage daughter or son hack the phone, so they could use WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube. WhatsApp was the preferred mode of communication for nearly all my participants. Many of my research interlocutors suggested

things that I should be watching or joining online, rather than vice-versa.[22]

'Everything that I wanted to write about, and that the media wouldn't let me publish, everything!' Esti exclaims, remembering her joy in discovering the forums of Hyde Park. 'Thousands of Haredi people, but you didn't know who they were, we only knew their anonymous identities. Just yesterday I was talking about it, just to remember, while I was sitting with friends. And one of them told me, "You know I wrote in Hyde Park." And I said, "What was your name in Hyde Park?" and she told me and I said, "Oh my god that was your name? I remember!" I remember the nicknames and now, I am just making the connections between the people and the nicknames. It was like a secret. You know the expression, 'outing'? Everybody respected that rule. Nobody knows who the people were that they were talking with.'

Throughout the story of the founding of her women's rights organisation, Esti uses language of queerness: 'outing,' 'in the closet,' 'coming out.' Her language is suggestive of the level of taboo associated with feminist ideology in the Haredi community. Like being queer in much of the world, being a feminist is dangerous in the Haredi world; anyone who becomes public in their activism is risking their position in the community, and the reputations and future prospects of their husbands and children.

'So, for the Haredi people, I think it was a level of their development to the next step— to Facebook,' Esti continues. 'Because now, there are a lot of Haredi people on Facebook. Huge groups of women writing about everything. But it was not legal in those years. For some groups, it's still not legal. But I think the horse is out of the barn.'

Esti uses the word 'legal' as if using social media is a criminal act within the Haredi world. In practice, as mentioned above, internet use and social media is widespread. However, it isn't acceptable, and must be hidden still. When my iPhone fell out of my bag at

[22] For more information on technology and those questioning their faith, see Fader 2020.

dance rehearsal, the girls standing near me stared openly, in a mixture of shock and fascination. Their mothers, meanwhile, sent me friend requests on Facebook.

'Even six years ago, when I started my activities,' Esti explained, 'in Facebook there was no group of Haredi women. That was the situation before six years ago. What happened before six years? It was before the elections of 2013. It was the end of the year 2012. I had just started studying filmmaking, and in that year a lot of things changed in my life. I had friends, I knew them from the forums. We just texted with each other. At first we were afraid to say who I am, and I didn't know— we just knew the nicknames. But after some years, we met. And we sat together for an evening, and we met in a coffee shop, and talked, and I told them, "You know, there is an election again" — because in Israel there are a lot of elections— "there is an election, and we are not part of this game." You understand? You can't talk about it, you are not part of anything, nothing!

'I told them that I wanted to change that, I wanted to do something, but I don't know what. But that evening, I came home, and I sat down at my computer, and I thought to myself, "What do I want to do?" I have a lot of things, a lot that I want to give, a lot I want to get out there. And I opened a Facebook page, and I called it *Lo Nivcharot, Lo Bocharot*. No Representation, No Voting, or No Voice, No Vote.'

Within this modern, secular act, there are echoes of the American Revolution. The slogan of the Sons of Liberty was 'No Taxation Without Representation,' which represented their grievance against the Crown for being taxed, at high levels, without being represented in Parliament. It is no coincidence that Esti chose a similar phrase for the name of her organisation. America is the ultimate experiment in secularism; separation of religion and the state was first proffered by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1801 (Jefferson 1801); it has become more central to American law and interpretation of the constitution since the middle of the nineteenth century. Esti's use of a phrase which evokes

the American Revolution suggests a similar movement for independence from the Haredi establishment for Haredi women.

'… After the elections, I published some columns, I had an interview— for the first time in my life, on the TV show, and I speak,' Esti continues. 'A lot of Haredi women— the first one was Michal— she just wrote me a message on Facebook, "Oh, I'm so excited to know that there is one more Haredi woman in the world that is interested in politics!" She was in the closet, she didn't know. From this time, I knew Michal. …[M]e and Racheli [Ibenboim], we met in one of the TV interviews … to talk about the issue of Haredi women and representation, and from this point we became friends. And we understand that we want to do something. And after that we just established a forum in the real world for Haredi women. After the election, we just started to meet. [They] came, and sat in a circle, and talked about this issue of Haredi women and politics, how it can work and how it can happen. And not only that, all the issues regarding Haredi women. At first it was a very secret group, most of the women were afraid that somebody would know that they were meeting with other women and talking about politics. It's things that they hide. We met in basements and secret locations in Bnei Brak and those kinds of places.'

The first of these meetings was described to me by Michal. It was a turning point for her; it was a moment that changed the course of her life. The first meeting has taken on a mythos of its own; though it wasn't long ago, no one can decide for sure exactly when it happened, perhaps it was late in 2014, or maybe it was 2015. Esti says it was in a secret basement in Bnei Brak, Michal thinks it was in a café in Tel Aviv, somewhere with no Haredi people nearby. She describes the circle: everyone arrived, and they sat, and everyone was shy, and a little bit scared, and no one spoke at first. Esti, or perhaps it was Racheli, asked everyone to go around and introduce themselves, and share just a sentence or two about why they came to the meeting.

‘But it was more than that,’ Michal says. ‘Each woman, as they went around, shared her entire life story.’

They confessed their hopes and fears, their frustrations and dreams, their trauma and their inner most thoughts. ‘I was last,’ Michal says. ‘I was seated right next to Esti and they had gone around the circle the other way. And so when they came to me, after hearing all the other women, that is when I announced, “Ok! I am going to run for the municipal election in El’ad!” Because I had heard all these other women say all the things I had been thinking, and I knew I was not alone.’

This declaration was not as sudden as it seems; Michal’s journey to this point will be explored further in Chapter Seven. It does, however, underscore the importance of the work of the artists as discussed in the previous chapter; the ability to openly communicate is fundamental to the creation of community. Not all of the women at this meeting became activists; yet the knowledge that they were not alone in their critiques, opinions, and struggles allows women agency and helps them resist as they so wish.

A number of the women who came to these meetings did, in fact, become activists, and created *Lo Nivcharot, Lo Bocharot*, in which they ultimately brought their resistance to the public sphere.

‘But, in time, we started to work in the *Knesset*,’ Esti explains. ‘It’s not like an official lobby, but we made a connection with the head of the committee for women’s rights in the *Knesset*. Her name was Aliza Lavie. She is not Haredi but she is religious. We had three discussions, regarding the health of Haredi women, regarding the education, and work. So, we understand that these three issues are very important in Haredi women’s life. For example, in the health discussions we gave a lot of data about diseases that Haredi women suffer from, like they are more at risk from breast cancer. Haredi women have no awareness about how to check themselves, how to know how to prevent the disease. All those

discussions, we invited the Haredi MKs, male MKs, to come, and nobody showed up. From these discussions, we all understood that we really have a problem. Because the women who were leading this group didn't agree with me. They said, "You can't fight with them. It's like a protest to say, 'No Voice, No Vote,' it's something that can create a reaction against us," but from these activities, they understood that we have to fight.'

The decision to take their grievances directly to the *Knesset* is another sign of the secularised way of thinking which the activists had adopted. Whereas Lexie and Rachel discuss the same problems within the Haredi community, their agency and forms of resistance exist within the Haredi ethical framework. *Lo Nivcharot, Lo Bocharot* instead used secular legal-political frameworks to create change.

'And in 2015 there was another election, and we were five women— it was me, Racheli, Esti Rieder, Michal, and Tali Farkash,' Esti continues. 'We were, like, in the media, a campaign, and there was a lot of reaction, a lot of bad comments. But we were like, out of the closet, because we were under our real names, our faces were in the media, everywhere. We were under the flag of, "Stop voting for those parties, they don't give you a place! As women!"'

'Coming out' had serious repercussions for many of the women involved, which I discuss further below. After the women of *Lo Nivcharot, Lo Bocharot* were officially known in their communities, Esti took action to create a more official home for the movement, within the recognised legitimate structures of mainstream Israeli society.

'At the end of 2015, I established an *amutah*, it's like an NGO,' she explains. 'It's a non-profit organisation. An official organisation. I understood that we needed money for our activities. I wanted to publish and disseminate materials. We needed money for this, and that's the way you can do that. From 2016 until now, that's what I'm doing, working in *Nivcharot*. It comes from *Lo Nivcharot, Lo Bocharot*— it means the elected? The elect? The

league? It's a double meaning.'

Nivcharot takes a two-pronged approach, working on projects both within the Haredi community, and through external channels, outside the community, using secular legal and political structures in Israel. This hybrid approach is not unusual for grassroots organisations (Dave 2012, Heywood 2018, Rinaldo 2014), especially grassroots organisations which seek to improve the status of women. However, the NGO-isation of women's rights and queer activist movements has been harshly criticised both internally by activists, as well as by activist-scholars and scholars in general. Dave's work with lesbian activists working alongside feminist activists in India suggests that the transformation of movements into legitimate NGOs limits these movements, because the organisations become answerable to outside funders who possess their own agendas (Dave 2012, 100). Within Israel, Lavie suggests that *Achoti*, the Mizrahi women's movement, surrendered significant power and leverage by becoming an NGO because they became beholden to the leadership of the New Israel Fund (NIF) (Lavie 2018, 4-18). The NIF controls NGO's relationship with the media, and the NIF is fundamentally a Zionist agency, according to Lavie (Ibid., 12-14). This exacerbated the identity crisis faced by Mizrahi activists, in which their ability to criticise the state is curtailed by the effort they must exert to perform and prove their Jewishness through Zionism (Ibid.).

In the case of *Nivcharot*, however, there may be significant advantages to becoming an NGO and establishing more legitimacy for the Haredi Feminist movement. Whereas Dave's and Lavie's activists were both working to change the way the respective governments treated women, and to correct unjust laws (Dave 2012, Lavie 2018), the women of *Nivcharot* are attempting to shift attitudes and standards within a community. Working in concert with the state in this situation is both an act of rebellion, in that Haredi ethics resist state involvement, and an advantageous strategy, in that the government's interests are at least in

part aligned with the goals of the feminists. The state seeks to transform Haredim into proper Israeli citizens, and feminist ideology, inasmuch as it is secular, is one path to do so. But it is because of this alliance and agency as an NGO that *Nivcharot* may, in the long term, face more significant challenges in their task within the Haredi community. Wittingly or unwittingly, this relationship makes *Nivcharot* an agent of the Israeli secular state's 'saviour mission.' As Abu-Lughod says, '[w]hen you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something. You are also saving her *to* [sic] something' (Abu-Lughod 2013, 46-47). In this case, the state seeks to save Haredi women from their perceived oppression, in order to transform them into better, meaning more secularised, Israeli citizens. It is inevitable that the Haredi establishment will see this state agency in the activism of *Nivcharot*. Nonetheless, the support offered by the state may make the associated risks worthwhile for Esti and her compatriots.

'The two main channels were are working are— one of them is out of the community, one of them is in the community. Within the community, we have made a lot of conferences, a lot of writing, raising awareness, with writing, with being in the media. And in the last two years, we've made *HaNivcharet*, it's like 'The League,' [a newsletter]. I understand that if we want change, we have to train Haredi women in leadership. So that's what our goal is to do. To train women, to take Haredi women, to make a process, to train them in mentor skills, and knowledge about how to be a leader, what does it mean, what do you need, to fight with them— to understand the real world, the politics world. That's what we are doing. We have also lobbied in the *Knesset*, we are a Haredi Women's Lobby at the *Knesset*, women from *Nivcharot* are a part of committees in the *Knesset*. They are giving position papers. They are speaking, and that's their chance to understand the world of the *Knesset*. We have our digital stuff, for all the PR, all the writing, these things.'

Nivcharot's activities are largely outside the Haredi community, but Esti discusses it as

'within the community' because the organisation is teaching other women, from within the Haredi community, how to do these things. She is focussed less on the presentations in the *Knesset*, which are nonetheless important, and more on the development of other Haredi women to be able to take these roles on. The focus of *Nivcharot* within the Haredi world is on leadership development.

'And in the outer channel [outside the community], the significant thing that we did was appeal to the supreme high court. We are not an official part of this appeal, but we joined and helped the petitioner with what to do. I'll explain what the appeal was about. *Agudat Yisrael*— you know *Agudas Yisrael*? [sic] It's part of United Torah Judaism. All those parties have statutes. In their statutes, it's written that a woman can't— the Hebrew, it's a very gendered language. It's written by males, that only men can be a part of that party. And they have another section where they write that women, they have like a group, *Neshot Agudat Yisrael* [the women of *Agudat Yisrael*]. It's nothing, and especially it's nothing in the politics.

'So, the Supreme Court, after three years, they tried to ignore it and fight it, the courts say that they have to change the section in their statute. So they declared they are going to change that section, but we are not going to change the practice. So for us, it was like, we win, but not really. It's like a symbolic win. For us, it's still winning, because it gave us the opportunity to raise this issue, to the public agenda, and to talk about this, and to give people the understanding — the Haredi women, the Haredi men, all of Israel— to give them the understanding that we have a problem. It's a democratic state, a state that wants to treat all their citizens with equality and all of these things. And a group of women cannot be a part of the public sphere, of the decision making point. It's crazy when you think about it.'

Ruth also filed a lawsuit, against Shas rather than *Agudas Yisrael*, as mentioned in the previous section. These two petitions were separate; however, as the appeals process extended over several years, both cases were taken over by the Rackman Center for the

Advancement of the Status of Women, a legal clinic that is part of the Bar-Ilan University Faculty of Law. Therefore, this victory is also a symbolic victory for Ruth Colian.

Nivcharot has been constantly running classes and workshops, all of which are fully enrolled.

'Next week we start the second group of women training, and it's very exciting,' Esti tells me, animated. 'Yesterday we just finished a group, a class we made, for women to practice speaking without fear. Women came and practiced their talk. So that's the thing we are doing now— empowering women to speak. Yesterday it was very, very exciting to hear the women. It came with a lot of fear, "How to speak? I don't know. I have no confidence." To give them the confidence so they can stand and talk was very, very exciting. On Monday we are opening the leadership one— it's another course. It's not only speaking, how to stand on the stage, it's how to work, how to be a leader, it's mentoring, a lot of stuff.'

To date, *Nivcharot* has trained over fifty women, according to their updated website (*Nivcharot* 2018). Esti is creating a veritable army of feminist leaders for the future, Haredi women who can operated as activists within the secular state machine to achieve change in the Haredi religious world.

Repercussions

The choice to become an activist is not without fallout. Taking on any sort of public role as a Haredi woman attracts attention; becoming a feminist activist can result in social exclusion. I asked Esti, Michal, and Ruth about the community responses to their activism.

'At first, they just ignored me,' Esti responded. 'One crazy woman from Petach Tikvah, she opened a Facebook page for her friends to stop voting for the Haredi media. OK, she is crazy. You don't have to worry!'

But as Esti's activism became more public and attracted more attention, her children felt the impact. They were excluded from school within the Haredi world; they were forced to attend a school which is *hashkafically* Chardal.

'It's hard,' she said. 'It's like, first they tried to ignore. I do not exist. After that, they tried to fight. One of the rabbis— he's not a famous rabbi, but he's a rabbi who has a lot of followers, people who come to his [lectures]. It was before the last elections that he said that those Haredi women, that want to be elected or want a presentation in Haredi politics, they are schizophrenics and they need psychiatric help. Because you cannot be a feminist and be Haredi. If that's so, then you are schizophrenic. He diagnosed us. That's the kind of response.'

Whereas in the previous discussion, in the Haredi world of the performing arts, secular knowledge and modern psychology are used as a tool of resistance, here they become the tools of oppression. Mental illness has long been one of the most strong taboos in the Haredi world, and one of the most feared afflictions. Labeling feminists as mentally ill therefore becomes a tool of deterrence: people do not want to be labeled as 'crazy,' and so feminists, feminist ideology, feminist sympathies will be avoided at all costs. It also serves to delegitimise the information from *Nivcharot*.

'A lot of shaming on the internet,' Esti continues. 'If I published an article on a Haredi website, you can read the comments. You cannot handle it. It was hard. Also, my children, I had to move them to other schools. But I feel that it was good for me because as a Mizrahi, if I wasn't a feminist and an activist, then I would have my own problems to get [access] to these schools. From the *Beis Yaakov* I had to move them to the schools of the Chardal— it's like National Haredi. Very strict, but they are more open. So, it was a hard situation, …. I experienced a lot of banning. But every time I am with the circle…' she trails off, suggesting that for her, the things she has lost may be worth losing, in favour of what she has gained.

Ruth's children were not excluded from *Beis Yaakov*, but given her history with the school, I believe that the school and the Supervisor of Independent Schools would not dare remove the children. In addition to the two lawsuits mentioned above, Ruth has also brought two other lawsuits: one against the hospital for the wrongful death of her infant son, and one against the Shas campaign for using, without asking permission or compensating her, a song she wrote about Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Both were successful. Ruth's daughter was removed from class several times, however, and questioned by the school and by Haredi party officials. For a short time, the police offered Ruth's daughter protection.

Michal did not experience the same level of exclusion within her home community in El'ad; this suggests that there is some level of protection in being an Ashkenazi women, and likely because she has good *yichus* as discussed in Chapter Three.

'It could have been worse,' Michal said. Her children were not excluded from school, nor were they harassed. 'The children's teachers make jokes to them, like, "When your mom is on the *Knesset* we can get this fixed!" Maybe this is because the children aren't in the typical, hard-core Haredi schools. They're in like modern-Haredi schools.'

At the time of the interview, Michal said that it was also a little easier on her husband, because he works outside the community. However, since the interview, Michal has now announced on social media that she has separated from her husband and is getting a divorce. I did note, when I was making field notes, that he seemed a bit weary of finding yet more strange women talking to his wife in the apartment when he came home during our first conversation. Slightly less than a year after Michal, Esti also shared on social media that her husband had granted her a *gett*; she never disclosed any problems in her marriage to me a year and a half previous. Ultimately, these women's activism creates stress within the family, and pressure on the family members from the rest of the community. Some families may survive it, while others may break apart. It is unclear if Michal's political activities are the

reason for her marriage ending; Ruth is also divorced, but she says it was an amicable split that was completely unrelated to her activism. The divorce happened years before she formed *Ubizchutan*.

Ultimately, despite exclusion, the Haredi Feminist Movement has had broad repercussions throughout the Haredi world. Esti recognises that *Nivcharot* has sparked a movement, but she says that it has grown beyond her and her small group of activists now. Though people may keep it a secret, the feminist movement is widespread within the Haredi world.

'I have a closed [Facebook] group, it's called Haredi Feminism, but people are talking there, men and women, talking about [these] issues,' she tells me, almost as an afterthought. 'But these issues are really there, really cared about. Because it's like things in the family, not only the politics and all of that, it's in the house, like the relationship between men and women. It's about women, and sexual harassment, and all of those issues that were hushed up. And now people are talking, and I've heard Haredi women say, "You gave us the courage to talk." So I understand it's not something that I can stop. It's not in my hands anymore.'

Esti's work, and the approach of *Nivcharot*, reveal that these women activists, and those who may sympathise with their cause, view the Haredi world as part of the larger national context of Israel, and part of the secular system of a democratic nation. Though Michal recognises that the Haredi community tries to maintain a separate reality, and creates a type of fiction that Haredi society is apart from the rest of the country, *Nivcharot* presents Haredi society as part of the national context, and instead suggests that the alternative value systems and ethics by which the Haredi world lives creates a disenfranchised class of women. While Esti and the others are labeled as 'radicals' and 'crazy' by the mainstream Haredi establishment leaders, the group and their activities are not as marginalised as this suggests.

Two Approaches In Contrast

Having spoken to both Ruth and Esti separately, but recognising the similar trajectories both feminist activists had followed, I finally asked Esti one day why she and Ruth had never worked together. Why wasn't Ruth a part of *Nivcharot*? Why did *Nivcharot* not support *Ubizchutan*?

'At that time that we made the campaign [*Lo Nivcharot, Lo Bocharot*], Ruth started her party,' Esti answers. She looks strained for the first time, like she is trying not to show any emotion. 'She tried to join us to her party, but I understand— the first thing, that I didn't want to join her party, because I know that there is no chance to win. It was, like, very early, from my perspective, because the field, I know, the reactions, the comments that I got, I know that they are not ready for this. That we have to work for some years and to do things with the community, before we want them to change all their perceptions and vote for women. I don't say she's radical, because it's the same thing that people say about me. That's her own way.

'Another reason why I didn't join her was because she didn't have any resources. I don't want to just crash— I understand we have a long road before we try to be a party. Additionally, the limit here in Israel to be a party is like four *mandatim*, four mandates [the equivalent of four seats in the *Knesset*]. It's huge. They made a law to prevent small parties from joining the *Knesset*. So you have to have four mandates— every mandate is, I don't know, a lot of people. You need a lot of money. You need to see that the people know you. I felt it was not the time. I know that Ruth was angry with me about that. But I think that I cannot do that. So she went her own way, and established the party, and we just became a movement. And all the time we emphasise that we are not a political movement. We are talking about politics but it's not the only issue. We have a lot of things to deal with before the political. And we have to train women for politics, for leadership. And that is what we are doing today.'

Esti believes that the first thing which needs to happen is to create a shift in the Haredi community's values, outlook, and perceptions. She feels that going forward with a Haredi women's party before the community is ready for it could potentially do damage, and make it even more difficult for a woman to be elected in the future. Esti's approach is based in grassroots organising, whereas Ruth's approach is to courageously lead.

I see Ruth again, about a week after I spoke with Esti about her attitudes towards Ruth. Ruth presents a somewhat different view, highlighted by her characteristic enthusiastic vehemence.

'Yes, I know Esti,' Ruth said. 'We don't have such good relations. Because when I wanted to start the party, she and Esti Rieder— you know Esti Rieder? So, Esti Rieder called me and threatened me.'

Ruth said that Esti Rieder told her not to link herself or any of her activities with *Ubizchutan* to *Nivcharot*. She also suggested that Ruth was taking money away from *Lo Nivcharot Lo Bocharot*'s cause, because they both were conducting crowdfunding campaigns. Ruth suggests that she was threatened with legal action by them, if she related any of her activities to *Nivcharot* or any of the two Estis' activism.

'I now understand the really sick illusion,' Ruth says, 'A really sick way of thinking that they have.'

Ruth also suggests that *Nivcharot* 'stole her idea' for a *Knesset* lobby; she says she had been trying to create a Haredi women's lobby for two or three years, and miraculously, after she mentioned it to someone connected to *Nivcharot*, they had the lobby. In order to create a lobby in the *Knesset*, there needs to be support from MKs. Ruth had support from the opposition, but lacked support from the coalition government. *Nivcharot* received support from both very quickly.

What remains clear is that there is no love lost between Ruth and the women of

Nivcharot. Ruth seems to make things happen by sheer force of will; she operates alone and doesn't often make alliances. *Nivcharot* activists work with a certain level of savvy and are quite politic in their approach. Ultimately, I believe the rift between *Ubizchutan* and *Nivcharot* stems from deep philosophical differences in approach, which may or may not be augmented by certain personality clashes. While these philosophical differences are extremely fundamental, as I will discuss further, Ruth and Esti nonetheless agree on the major issues relating to the position of women in the Haredi world which need addressing.

Both women are concerned about domestic violence within the Haredi community, as well as *agunot* [women who are being denied divorces by their husbands] and the dire economic status of single mothers. Both women discuss breast cancer awareness, and the general poor information available for women's public health. They both also care about wage inequality, and how much less women are paid in teaching positions than men, within the Haredi world. In general, poverty is a significant issue when addressing the status of women in the Haredi world. And naturally, both Esti and Ruth care deeply about the representation of Haredi women in the *Knesset*. What both women disagree about is the approach that is necessary in achieving change in these areas.

Esti and *Nivcharot* rely heavily on cooperation with partner organisations and leaders who offer financial and political support. *Nivcharot*'s leadership classes are partially funded by WIZO, the Women's International Zionist Organization; Esti works with *Chochmat Nashim*, a women's rights organisation in Beit Shemesh which is not specifically Haredi, but rather broadly religious; *Nivcharot* has also presented white papers to the United Nations as well as the *Knesset*; and they maintain a working relationship with Aliza Lavie, a National Religious woman who was an MK for *Yesh Atid*. *Yesh Atid* was a party which largely represented the interests of centrists in Israel, and the majority of *Yesh Atid* voters were secular or traditional middle class Jews. *Yesh Atid* has dissolved, and its members joined the

Blue and White liberal centrist alliance; the current coalition government included members of the Blue and White. Aliza Lavie does not currently have a seat in the *Knesset*. *Nivcharot* are a Haredi organisation, but they do not bind themselves to the Haredi value system, and cooperate broadly with secular and nationalist groups and individuals.

Ruth takes the opposite approach: she will not compromise Haredi values in order to achieve her goals. She says of Michal,

'Listen, I don't feel that it's the right way. I would never run with a non-religious party.'

She clarifies this a little, telling me that actually, she might run with a party that is not religious, but there are non-religious parties who also aren't supporting the buses on *shabbat*. Ruth will not compromise her religious beliefs in order to win a place in the *Knesset*. Furthermore, she believes that her Haredi ethics and values should be applied to the whole country; they are an absolute, and absolutely correct, rather than a choice that she has taken on as part of her religious identity.

'It is one thing to run with a secular party,' she says, 'but it is another thing to join a party that does not [preserve the sabbath].'

In this way, despite her feminist ideology, Ruth maintains her undivided, intertwined religious-political identity. She is the Haredi ethical woman of the last sixty years within her own identity, rather than a New Haredim, though she is one of the New Haredi Middle Class by virtue of her law school education. Esti and Michal have separated their religious identity from their political ones.

The difference in approaches between Ruth and Esti is reflective of broader changes within Haredi society. As Haredi society evolves and absorbs certain secular ideologies, the outlook of the community is gradually fragmenting. One of the significant divisions concerns the application of Haredi ethics and values to the greater nation as a whole. This is somewhat different than the claim of authenticity which is innate in Haredi Judaism; rather, this is a

question of whether one recognises the separation of the secular government from the institution of religion. Esti's approach separates the two; Ruth's approach mandates religion as part of the state. Both of these approaches involve knitting together the secular and the religious; it is instead a difference in interpretation in, if the reader will allow, the types of stitches used—whether the yarn of Haredi ethics attains primacy in the pattern, or a balance is struck.

'Look,' she says, 'Israel is a Jewish State and a Democracy. In the world, you have lots of Democracies, but of the Jewish States? You have only one.'

This is particularly interesting in light of the time in which we were speaking; it was in February or March of 2019, just after Netanyahu had passed the Nation State Law (Hirschhorn 2018). Fundamentally, Ruth is also revealing that her political outlook bends right, with the Zionist parties, once she removes herself from the Haredi context. This is part of the greater process of pluralisation which is occurring in the Haredi political world presently, and which I will discuss further in Chapter Eight.

Both Esti and Ruth adopt feminist ideology in negotiation with religious ethics, by applying an egalitarian ethos to matters of socioeconomics, public health, and the political system. They differ on understandings of the separation or unification of religion and the state. Ultimately, both approaches and contributions are meaningful in creating change, and the reverberations of the Haredi feminist movement are clearly felt even in the most stringent of Haredi establishments.

The Haredi Feminist Movement is influenced by early secular thinkers like Wollstonecraft, in that it is constructed around beliefs of equal worth and therefore equal rights (Bryson 2003, 17), and it stems from a rejection of the social hierarchies which perpetuate poverty and inequality for both men and women (Ibid., 20), in this case the discrimination against non-Ashkenazim. This feminism also reflects the mainstream liberal

feminism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century suffragettes; but unlike Christabel Pankhurst (Ibid., 81-82) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Ibid., 29-35), who grounded their efforts in the Christian moral imperative, the Haredi Feminists have liberated their feminism from religion. Perhaps in Michal's case, in her belief in the mission and politics of the Labour Party, some of her feminism has taken on Marxist or socialist dimensions, but in terms of the articulation of goals by Ruth and Esti, the Haredi Feminist Movement is simply one for straightforward equal rights.

Despite being organised in large part by non-Ashkenazi women, the Haredi Feminist Movement has avoided intersectionality, as discussed above. There is not yet room for a Sephardi Haredi Angela Davis within the struggles of the Haredi feminists (Davis 1981), nor is there a Judith Butler questioning the very assumption of sex and gender among Haredim (Butler 1999). The Haredi Feminists have, however, placed the issue of women and public health front and centre, which is an unusual tactic. Through health activism, for example through breast cancer awareness, the Haredi Feminists can legitimately begin to limit the infinite authority of *Da'as Torah*. The stringent modesty standards imposed by the rabbinic leadership are, in the example of breast cancer, as well as domestic violence, in conflict with the Jewish mandate of *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life. The investment in public health and secular equal rights begins to present a path forward in curtailing the power of the rabbis and the reach of *Da'as Torah*.

In the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned Blu Greenberg and her predictions for the inevitability of feminism reaching the Jewish world. Since Greenberg, feminism has flourished in certain parts of the Modern Orthodox world, where women have formed *minyanim*, and several organisations have begun to grant *smicha* to women. Within Modern Orthodox Feminism, the focus has chiefly been religious change, as it has been without Orthodoxy, in movements including Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Liberal

Judaism. This is because these movements have maintained the Western Liberal ideology around secular-religious distinctions, as established in Chapter Two. In Modern Orthodoxy, there has always been a certain amount of acceptance of secularisation and modernisation in parts of life considered outside the realm of religious authority. Therefore, Modern Orthodox women's fights for equal pay have been a part of the greater world's feminism and secular feminist movements. By definition, a Modern Orthodox Feminist Movement applies the theories of feminism to the tenets of Orthodox Judaism. Haredi women live in a completely different paradigm, in which there is almost no distinction between religious life and secular life; the everyday has been made religious through the most stringent interpretations of *halacha* and the power of *Da'as Torah*. Haredi women are not yet ready to explore ideas of women rabbis and being counted as part of a *minyan*; they must first fight the battles which their secular ancestors waged one or two centuries ago. In addition, they have a different understanding of their roles as Jewish women, and would find great fault with Plaskow's statement that women have been excluded from the process of 'naming and shaping the Jewish tradition' (Plaskow 1990). Indeed, many Haredi women, like Miriam earlier in this chapter, find a certain type of empowerment in their femininity as it is dictated within Judaism (Kaufman 1991). To approach changing religion as part of the feminist agenda in the Haredi world will take some time yet, and a certain amount of natural evolution in the activist movement (Bryson 2003); at that point there may also be room for queer activism (Dave 2012, Stackhouse 2005). It remains to be seen whether such changes will even be possible. Certainly at present, with very little exception,[23] Haredi feminists are not interested in access

[23] Following my research, an article was published in Haaretz concerning a Belz woman who is promoting ideas around women and Torah learning (Littman 2019). Malki Rotner, the woman in question, is certainly unusual; she also benefits from an extremely high position in her community due to *yichus*, and this allows her far more freedom without repercussions. Perhaps she is the first of her kind, and more will follow. She is not seeking anything very radical as of yet; currently she simply wants women to have better quality learning. In addition, there is a women's *beit midrash* which caters to Haredi women and operates in secret in Jerusalem (Chizik-Goldschmidt 2020).

to the *beit midrash* or the Torah scroll. They are more concerned with the practicalities of earning fair wages, and surviving to old age.

Conclusions

The Haredi Women's Feminist Movement is an unsurprising result of the changes that have been taking place in the Haredi world in Israel. Like other aspects of Haredi life, the Feminist Movement represents a negotiation between the secular knowledge and values which Haredim are inevitably exposed to, the machinations of the state apparatus, and the religious values which are at core of Haredi ethics. The feminists knit in strands of feminist ideology as part of their work of negotiation of the secular and the religious, and more of these strands are finding purchase in the scarf of Haredi society. Acceptance of feminism is still low, but growing in the Haredi world. Haredi women maintain feminist values and accept religious patriarchy as not mutually exclusive, and negotiate these complexities with sensitivity. Feminists apply equal rights values to parts of Haredi life which lie outside of the clear realm of *halacha*, and in doing so, limit the authority of *Da'as Torah* within their lives. The Feminist Movement is split between those who work cooperatively with those outside of the Haredi world and accept liberal values of pluralism, and those who adhere strictly to Haredi-only partnerships. Ultimately, the Haredi Feminists share a similar type of feminism in terms of the practical application to issues of women's health, economic parity, and safety. The Haredi Feminist Movement is significant in that activists are created as a result of intersectional identities, in which they experience discrimination based on their race, class, and gender, but the Movement avoids articulating intersectional goals. This is likely due to the danger of doing so, especially in light of the precariousness of the Feminist Movement in the Haredi world, and the prevalence of racism. Ultimately, the Haredi Feminist Movement

represents an adoption of secular values in the least dangerous manner, in order to ensure long-term survival of feminist ideology within a community that is extremely resistant. Though NGO-isation is strongly criticised within activist feminist scholarship, in the case of Haredi Feminists it may serve to be less of a hindrance. NGO-isation also transforms Haredi Feminists into agents of the state, insofar as the state seeks to break down religious ethics and transform Haredim into secularised citizens. Haredi Feminism is thus bounded by Haredi women's status as members of a religious minority. Haredi women negotiate the secular values of feminism with their religious ethics; the community responds in kind with some resistance towards these secular ideas, but creeping acceptance. Ultimately, the Haredi Feminist Movement is one of the new ways of being Haredi is produced.

Chapter Seven: Political and Religious Identity

This chapter argues that people in the Haredi world are currently separating their Haredi religious identity from their political identity, and there are emerging a range of Haredi political identities. Picking apart the entwinement of the political and the religious is not transforming people into something other than Haredi; rather, these processes are producing new types of Haredim of a plurality of types. The processes under which these fragmentations are taking place are all essentially the same. This represents the culmination of nearly a century of negotiations between religious values and ethics with the secularising agenda of the state of Israel. The picking apart and knitting together of the other processes discussed in this thesis has contributed directly to this process. In terms of the (now possibly over-extended) knitting metaphor, these processes look like an unravelling of the part of the scarf where the political and the religious have been completely entwined, and reknitting the block of religious identity separate to a section of the scarf that is political identity. The political identity section of the scarf will include new yarns from secular skeins; these will be different for different people. In the scarf of Haredi society, each of these new parts of individual scarves may blend into the complexity of the rest of the scarf, or some may poke out as bobbles or tassels. These new political identities do not diminish people's Haredi-ness; rather, the negotiations explored in this chapter represent the range of ways in which people shape similar religious ethics into different political meanings.

This chapter discusses the political backdrop against which I conducted research,

including the leadership of Trump in America, and the (first) 2019 Israeli General Election. Within these contexts, women articulated political identities which broke away from the centrist stance of the Haredi parties, and aligned with both the Left and the Right Wings of the Israeli political spectrum. Michal Tchernovitsky details her gradual process of realisation that she harboured socialist beliefs, and her commitment to the Israeli Left and *Avodah*, the Labour Party. She believes her religious ethics are supremely compatible with socialist values; others tell me of their left-wing sympathies and shock at the acceptance of Trump in the Haredi world. From Michal's Leftist Awakening, I move on to ethnography conducted with women who embrace the Far Right, including groups considered Jewish terrorists by the Israeli government. These women remain Haredi; they do not espouse a type of Jewish ethic that is Chardali, though their beliefs align politically with some Chardalim. They have been radicalised through their displacement from traditional Haredi neighbourhoods to specific settlements in the West Bank. Other Haredim have moved politically to the Right, though in a less extreme way, through their move to Haredi-only settlements. In this way, their negotiation of their identities with the machinations of the state apparatus have ultimately been to the benefit of the state's agenda in expansion and occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Though those going Left and those going Right are the result of similar processes of negotiation with the secular, the results of the choice of the Left or the Right have vastly different implications for the future of the state of Israel.

The Haredim and Israeli Politics

The final three months of my fieldwork were during the lead-up to what would become the first Israeli General Election of 2019, though at the time everyone, including myself, believed it was the only General Election of 2019. There were also nation-wide municipal

elections in most cities, including Jerusalem and Beit Shemesh. Everyone was abuzz with political talk. In general, my interlocutors were more preoccupied with the local municipal elections than the national ones, though this was not universally true. Perhaps, for a community whose identity centres on distance from the secular, governmental state, the municipal elections felt more relevant to the Haredi community.

One day at the dance school, in the adult classes during the day, in the middle of stretches and warm-ups, Rachel said, 'What is next week Monday, ladies? That's right! Election day! And we know who we *are* voting for, and who we're *not* voting for, right?'

She laughed a little bit, and followed it up with the comment, 'Of course, I'm not telling you who to vote for, you should vote how you want.'

I am not convinced that the follow-up comment was not for my benefit, and I do not know if it would have been said if I had not been dancing that day. It may have been said no matter who was in the room, but I have no way of making that judgement.

The reality is that since the beginning of the state of Israel, the Haredi community has tended to vote as a bloc, and follow the advice of *rabbanim* about which candidate is best for the community interests. The three Haredi parties, *Agudat Yisrael*, Shas, and *Degel haTorah*, may run individual candidates against each other in municipal elections in heavily Haredi areas; in the national elections, Agudat Yisrael and Degel haTorah ally to form United Torah Judaism, which ultimately is a very centrist party, as is Shas.[24] The far right is dominated by the Yamina, the union of Right Wing Parties, which include groups like the Jewish Defense League, *Tkuma* [meaning revival, resistance, or resilience], and *HaBayit haYehudi* [the Jewish Home party]. More centrist right-wing parties include those like *Likud*, Benjamin Netanyahu's party, and the New Right party, of which Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked are

[24] It is worth noting, as mentioned in Chapter Two, that non-Ashkenazi voters in Israel are considered to be prevalently Right Wing (Lavie 2018, Shohat 2017), and often vote as a bloc for *Likud*, Netanyahu's party (Lavie 2018, 66). Shas, and therefore Haredi-ness, offers an alternative to Zionist Mizrahi identity.

a part. Simply by virtue of being not Zionist,[25] the Haredi parties are not really considered to be Right Wing within Israel.

'Shas and [United Torah Judaism] … they are centre,' Michal tells me, as she draws diagrams of the political spectrum, and the multitude of political parties in Israel. 'Because they will go… with whoever offers the best deal for the Haredim.'

Bina's interpretation of the stance of Haredi parties is similar to Michal's, though she suggests that several other parties are left wing which Michal describes as centre-right, such as Likud. 'Haredi institutions are so desperate for funding that votes can be bought,' Bina tells me. 'The Haredi parties aren't ever going get a majority, not in my lifetime at least. So instead, there is like this desperation mentality. How do we fund our schools? Have you seen most of our schools? They are in such a terrible state. But if the Haredi parties are willing to make an alliance with someone, that means they've made some sort of deal. So when the rabbis tell us to vote for someone, we do it, because it's the only way to improve the community.'

Ultimately, community behaviour around voting is dictated by the historically enmeshment of the religious and the political that became integral to Haredi identity. However, this entwinement is slowly getting picked apart by the various changes that have occurred in the last decade. The rapid changes of the previous chapters are forcing negotiations of identity, and this is leading to hybridisations (Lefkowitz 2006, 263); these hybrid identities sometimes seem almost antithetical to the established Haredi ethical person, but are nonetheless Haredi.

In Dalsheim's 2019 work *Israel Has a Jewish Problem*, she suggests that Haredi society will be completely transformed within the next generation (Dalsheim 2019, 96). She suggests

[25] Lavie suggests that in order to be Right Wing in Israel, it is necessary to be Zionist, an assessment with which my ethnography aligns. However, she also suggests that *Meretz* and *Avodah* are neo-conservative parties (2018, 9-11, 68) and suggests that there are no truly left-wing parties in Israel (Ibid., 62-70), which leads me to use Lavie with caution.

this will eliminate traditional, religious Judaism as it has existed for the last several centuries. Indeed, Haredi society is changing, but as we have found out in previous chapters, this is not a new development and indeed is part of the negotiations which all identities undergo. Furthermore, I truly believe that there will endure a core at the centre of the Haredi establishment which will cling to traditionalism and conservatism, be slow to change, and maintain the unification of the political and the religious in their identity and outlook. They will resist all forms of secularisation as fiercely as they ever had. This is especially true of certain Hasidic communities. Furthermore, the anti-Zionist extremist fringe will also continue to resist and react to the Zionist state, and the influences of this will continue to affect the Haredi world. The changes which I will be discussing are occurring in many quarters of the Haredi world, but they are not universally applicable; nor are they necessarily un-Haredi.

On the surface, this could be understood to be a chapter on the secularisation of the Haredi women who appear in the ethnographic accounts. To separate one's political identity from the religious would be, in the context of pre-War European foundations of Haredi identity, to secularise. The entwinement at that point in time was a necessary component of resisting the secular. But today, unpicking the political ideology of one's identity from the religious adherence to Haredi ethics is not necessarily so clearly an act of secularisation. These women are not agents of secularisation in their community; Michal is still Haredi, and Shaindel and Grune have not become *Dati Leumi*. As the previous chapters have displayed, secular knowledge and ideology is constantly absorbed and reproduced within the Haredi world, and done so in combination with Haredi values and ethics. This is the next logical step in that process; but it is not, as Asad mentions, people being 'pushed, seduced, coerced, or persuaded' into secularism (2003, 154); it is the negotiation of the secular with the religious. As Mahmood tells us, 'modern secularism has transformed religious identity' (2016, 2), but these categories of 'religious' and 'secular' are not mutually exclusive; the binary is a false

one (Asad 2003, 25).

There can be 'multiple, independent (possibly mutually exclusive) reasons for subscribing to a secular ethic' (Ibid., 6). As part of the transformation of the religious identity under the modern secular state (Mahmood 2016, 2), we must seek to understand the complex forces at play in these shifts and negotiations; negotiations can be part of powerful resistances (Lefkowitz 2006, 265), and emotion is often central to moral and ethical formation (Asad 2003, 90). Below, we can see how the secular political has increasingly penetrated the personal (Ibid., 186), but we must remember that political consciousness and critical interpretations are inextricably linked (Rinaldo 2014, 83). In the chapter that follows, we can see how the state plays a role in 'transforming preexisting religious differences, producing new forms of communal polarization, and making religion more rather than less salient' (Mahmood 2016, 2) in Israel today.

There is an assumption that secularism is inextricably linked to liberalism; that the Left is naturally secular, but the Right is somehow less secular (Asad 2018, 19). However, 'liberalism' and the many forms which the Right takes (Authoritarianism, Fascism, Alt-Right, etc) are governed by the same liberal values and secular ideologies (Mahmood 2016, 5; Asad 2018, 19). Thus, the two extremes explored below are both part of the same process in the secular modern state. It does, however, matter that they result in very different outlooks and ideologies. While 'going Left' and 'going Right' are results of the same process, the ultimate implications are markedly different for the Left and the Right, and these implications have real-world, life or death results which matter to the future state of Israel, the future of the Palestinian people, and the future of global conflicts.

Trump the Messiah?

About a year prior to the first General Election of 2019, in Spring of 2018, one of my

fieldwork trips to Israel coincided with the date chosen by United States President Donald Trump as the opening of the new American Embassy in Jerusalem, part of his controversial decision to officially recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The date of the event was announced last minute, less than a day before he planned on flying to the country; had I known that my arrival would coincide with his, I would have changed my plans in order to avoid such a chaotic time to arrive at Ben Gurion Airport and travel to my accommodation in Jerusalem. As it was, despite my accommodation being fairly close to the site of the new embassy, the streets of Jerusalem were quieter than I expected when I arrived just two hours after Trump's departure. The neighbourhood in which I was staying, Katamonim, is populated mainly by National Religious people, and so I was not surprised to see remnants of the festival atmosphere that had prevailed during Trump's visit, with Israeli flags hanging out of windows and signs on the lamp posts reading, 'Trump Make Israel Great Again.'

What I found somewhat more surprising was the sign that was hanging on Strauss Street, across from Bikur Cholim Hospital, a main thoroughfare near the Mea Shearim neighbourhood in Jerusalem. A large poster hung on a fence, also reading 'Trump Make Israel Great Again,' but instead of the blue and white theme seen throughout the rest of Jerusalem, this poster had a golden background with typically Hasidic crown iconography, such as the crown insignia seen on many strict Kosher *mehadrin* seals [indicating a very strict level of rabbinic kosher supervision]. It was hanging on a fence at the rear of the Russian Compound, a police centre, which suggests it may have been hung by the police, who are not likely to be Haredi, but the imagery would argue more strongly for its origins in the Haredi community. This street acts as a gateway to the Haredi neighbourhoods of north Jerusalem, and are close to the heavily self-policed streets of the most stringent communities in Mea Shearim. Frequently, I read anti-Zionist graffiti and broadsides in HaShabbat Square, just a block and a half away from where the poster hung. I did not expect Haredi sentiments to be

so aligned with those of the Nationalists as this Trump sign suggested.

Throughout much of the Haredi world in Israel (and elsewhere), there is much love for Trump. Most of the women with whom I conducted research spoke of him with admiration and hope, and he was broadly considered to be the best American President for the Jewish people in many years. While the Haredi parties may not be considered Right Wing in the Israeli context, especially given the complicated relationship with Zionism, the Haredi community is nonetheless attracted to conservatism. Whether or not Trump is truly conservative is not relevant to this particular discussion; what matters is that he is perceived to be a sort of saviour for conservatives, and the Haredim in Israel have embraced his role as such. Michal suggests that certain parts of the religious ethic correspond well with conservative political thinking.

'Here it [conservatism] connects well with being religious,' Michal says. We were deep in a discussion of the mentalities of the Left and the Right in Israel, and the ways in which Haredi values align with various perspectives. 'I as a person believe in redemption. Religious people believe in redemption. But again: are we sitting and waiting for *Moshiach* [Messiah], or we have to bring, like, the *moshiach*, you know – we have to bring it. So, I think that we have to be both. But again, you can sit and wait for *Moshiach* or you can go and do something. Maybe we should be like *Moshiach* and bring him. So, I think that we should be both. I think that it is our responsibility to redeem the world, but we still need a *moshiach* to bring it to a conclusion. I think these things complement each other. Because if you don't believe in the possibility of redemption at all… You have to believe in the possibility of redemption in order to say: So, let's do it. I often feel that right-wing attitudes say: There will never be peace and we will always hate each other. Humanity is very crooked and bad. Also, economically, what can we do? There will always be rich and poor. It's fate. There will always be rich and poor. So, what do you want?'

Michal is talking about the two mindsets that she believes exist in the Haredi world, in terms of the Jewish duty toward *tikkun olam* which brings the messiah. She is suggesting that one theological interpretation takes a passive approach, a mentality of continuous waiting, because only the coming of the messiah will redeem the world. She suggests this creates a mentality that minimises the importance of suffering and injustice in the world, because the only one who can mend the world is the messiah. This mindset shifts agency and responsibility away from human beings and onto the divine.

But Michal's '*moshiach*' for the Left and the Right touches on something significant to the secular political state, as well. Though both the Left and the Right are products of this secular modernity, Wendy Brown suggests that the polarisation which is increasingly present in our political life are a function of 'Western political theory's own impoverished understanding of religion and religious need' (Brown 2010, 86). Brown writes of the Left's redemptive myth within the Obama campaign's Yes We Can slogan (Ibid., 85), and the problem of 'our hopes versus their hopes, our Messiah versus theirs' (Ibid., 86). Michal understands the polarisation of modern politics in the secular state, how it serves the state, and the ways in which Trump and Obama become figureheads for different types of secular morals and ethics.

I mentioned that some of the Hasidic women I know believe in the imminence of the messiah, and believe that he may arrive any day, perhaps even tomorrow.

'That's the problem,' Michal exclaims. 'What if he doesn't come? That's just what I was talking about. It's like, you believe, but you wait for him to come and until then… so it gives you patience. Now everything is terrible, but tomorrow he will come. About the issue of *moshiach* I could speak forever.'

But, she suggests, the other approach is to take action to make the world ready for the messiah, to hurry his coming by making the world more like the redeemed world to come.

She says she believes in both, meaning that she believes redemption will only be complete with the arrival of the messiah, but in order to reach redemption, in order for the messiah to arrive, humans must do what they can to improve the world. Michal believes that religious people who wait for the messiah are more sympathetic to conservative politics, whereas religious people who believe that human actions will bring messiah are already used to thinking like political progressives. Deep theological differences translate into a deep political divide .

'It's like saying Barak Obama— No, no, that's just it!' Michal says as I laugh at the idea of Obama as the Progressive Messiah. She continues, 'I really felt it, the difference between Barak Obama's first elections and the second. In the first elections it was like people voted for him because they felt *Moshiach* had come. Really, it was voting for *Moshiach*. And then they were very disappointed because, oh, he's not *Moshiach*. He's not like we thought, he wasn't capable, he also failed in most of the things he tried to do. And then they elected him again, so that was the more meaningful election as I see it. Because the second time meant understanding that it is not him alone, it's all of us. And it's okay, we're all human. And no one is *Moshiach*. Stop waiting for *Moshiach*, he won't come. That's just the point. And still voting. I think that's the difference. But it repeats itself in the world constantly. You expect, wait for *Moshiach*. And then - Trump is the *moshiach* for other people. He is their *moshiach*. And they too will be disappointed in the end.'

Indeed, the signs on the streets of Jerusalem, and the way in which many people spoke of Trump throughout my field research, he was like a messiah to many. Like many of the National Religious, my Haredi interlocutors believed that American recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was the first step toward redemption. My shock upon seeing the signs in Mea Shearim was due to my historical understanding of Haredi identity, and the separation of theology from nationalism. The reaction of the Haredi world towards Trump is a sign of

the level of change that has occurred, and the complexification of the Haredi religious and political perspective. I was not, however, alone in my surprise toward the Haredi love of Trump. Tovah tells me,

'I was shocked about Trump in the *frum* world. Since when did becoming *frum* mean I had to become a Republican?'

Here we see the *ba'alei teshuvah* choice for what it is: becoming *frum* is a religious choice, not a political one; being Haredi, then, is a religious identity, not a political one. While some *ba'alei teshuvah* are, of course, adherent to the Haredi communal behaviour surrounding politics, it is still under the understanding of two separate parts of their identity, the religious and the political.

'When I was in the States, sure, I would have voted for Hilary,' Sitta tells me. 'But now, I'm in Jerusalem, I'm Haredi, and, well,' she shrugs, 'I don't really vote anymore.'

Sitta, unable to reconcile her former political identity with her new religious identity, instead chooses to remove herself from participation in politics entirely.

'Not all politics need to be dictated by Torah,' Tovah tells me. 'There's the practical, and then there's the ideological. Personally, in politics, often my concerns about the security of the country matter more than any other concerns.'

Sarah, too, treats security concerns as primary. When discussing Ruth Colian's party, Sarah tells me that while she is intrigued by the idea, she is concerned that someone like Ruth would have no idea how to handle the country's security. This subjugation of feminist concerns in favour of national security is not an obstacle only for Haredi feminists: Lavie's Mizrahi feminists of the 2003 Single Mothers' March also ultimately capitulated in the face of national security concerns as well (Lavie 2018). It's important to note that Sarah is Ashkenazi *frum* from birth, as were her parents before her; yet she does not view her voting behaviour as dictated by her Haredi identity. Whether it was the influence of *ba'alei teshuvah*

or other changes, Sarah is representative of the new type of Haredim, who vote based on their own opinions. She is not part of the New Middle Class— no one in her family has a university degree, she works at a low-paying desk job in a community office, and the family lives in Arzei Habira while her husband attends *kollel*. She is a perfect example of mainstream, establishment Litvish Haredi womanhood, yet she has a completely separate political identity from her religious one. Ultimately, for whatever reason, the once unified religious-political Haredi identity is fragmenting and breaking apart. She, too, is picking apart and re-knitting.

'Ultimately, I vote for the person who I want to,' Tovah concludes. 'In the end, *Hashem* is still in charge.'

Michal's Leftist Awakening

For some, picking apart the political and the religious in their identity has led them to lean Left politically, and embrace liberal values and politics. Asad tells us that early Liberalism was 'engaged in challenging hegemonic power…. Now… it is the ally of global power' (Asad 2013, 19). It recognises the individuality of each human voter as equal (Ibid., 18), and assumes a modality of neutrality toward difference which (should) foster pluralism (Ibid., 20). Marxism, socialism, and labour movements are of course also part of the greater secular Left, though Lavie suggests that *Avodah*, the Israeli Labour party which will become relevant below, has long ago left such socialist tendencies behind in favour of neoliberalism (Lavie 2018). Either way, the Left within Israel today is very distinctly focussed on the above mentioned secular ideals of equality and pluralism in the modern state. Michal Tchernovitsky is very conscious of the process which she underwent in unpicking her political identity from her Haredi religious ethic; for her, this process lasted over twenty years, and it was one which

she kept secret from her family for the majority of that time.

It began in early November 1995. Michal took to the streets of Tel Aviv with her school friends to protest the Oslo Accords. It was something that she remembers feeling not at all strongly about, it was simply what everyone else was doing in her class at school. She says that maybe one of her friends had encouraged the rest, a certain friend who came from a household which was perhaps more Chardal than Haredi. Michal attended the march, but for her, it was less about the Oslo Accords and rather an opportunity for a nice day out with friends. A few days later, her parents were listening to the news on the radio, and she heard that Yitzhak Rabin had been assassinated.

'It made me start to think,' Michal said. 'Who was this man? What did he stand for? What did he believe? What do I believe? And I realised that what he stood for was really good, and so I had to think about what I stood for.'

Her transformation was a slow process. Michal describes slowly realising that she felt her 'Torah values', her Haredi ethics, aligned well with the values of the Left. The more she began to think about her priorities, and her beliefs, her morals and her ethics, the more she realised that she cared about civil rights and human rights. She began volunteering with *Bat Melech* [literally 'daughters of the king'], an organisation that supports abused religious women, both Haredi and others.

In 2008 to 2009, Michal decided to take a Social Democracy course run by the Kinesset, and she told me that she was the first religious, not to mention Haredi, woman to have ever enrolled in such a course. During the course, she met Amir Peretz, who was a prominent member of *Avodah* [the Israeli Labour Party] at the time, in a one-to-one meeting and she was very impressed with him.

'I woke up one morning, and I looked in the mirror, and I said, "Michal, you're Left Wing!"'

This was a turning point for Michal. Until this moment, she had been having a crisis of faith, unsure of how to rationalise her internal process of increasingly independent thinking and her development of a political consciousness independent of her religious identity. She had joined *Bat Melech* because of this, hoping that she could find a way to live an ethically Haredi life while also making the world a better place in the ways that she felt were important. Once she acknowledged that she was, in fact, ideologically a socialist, she joined *Avodah*, though it would be a few more years before she would become active in the party. After becoming a Labour party member, Michal no longer questioned her religious Haredi identity, and is clearly comfortable with and proud of her membership in her religious community.

To understand how unlikely it is for Haredim to associate with the Left Wing parties in Israel, it is important to realise that, before meeting Michal, everyone else I met suggested that she was running for office with *Avodah* simply because they were the only party that would allow her to join. People found it impossible to believe that Michal was actually politically Left in her beliefs.

'What you have to understand,' Bina told me, 'is that Haredi women who want to run for office will be forced to go with whatever party that takes them. Maybe they had someone fall off their list; maybe they just think for whatever reason it's worth taking you on. But it's not because these Haredi women are, like, agreeing with these parties.'

Shortly after I completed my fieldwork, I gave a presentation on the New Haredi Feminists at a conference of Israeli Studies. Even outside of the community, outside of Israel, in a room full of academics, both Israeli and European, everyone in who attended my presentation had assumed that Michal was running on the 2019 *Avodah* ticket because they were the only party that would accept her onto their list. After the presentation, some scholars continued to question whether she could really be as 'Left Wing' as she seemed. While the

Haredim are not necessarily 'Right' within Israel, as discussed above, their aversion to the secular has created a deep impression on the psyche of those both within and without the community, and it is impossible for many people to imagine the possibility of a Left Wing Haredi person.

'Michal, she is a very honest person,' Esti Shushan told me, when I asked her about Michal and *Avodah*. I had not yet met Michal, and so I did not yet know about her process of awakening her political consciousness. 'That's her unique personality. And I think when she became a feminist and she tried to demand equality for women, I think she realised that she cannot ignore the suffering of other people. I'm trying to understand her perception. So from her perspective, when we occupied another people, we took from them their rights. It's not only the Palestinian issue, it's also the refugees, all the objectives of Labour, and the left side of Israel, she really believes it. If she were really political, she would have joined a different party. But she's very honest, that's what I'm trying to tell you. She always says, "I don't like to hide any more. I don't want to hide my opinions, it was enough for me [before]. And I want to say what I'm thinking, and what I want to promote, and this is my agenda."'

Michal is truly Left Wing politically, and Haredi religiously. In order to reach the point where both identities could co-exist within her person, Michal had to undergo the difficult process of picking apart the religious and political parts of her identity; separating them from their enmeshment and allowing each to exist independent of each other. Until she reached the point where she could look in the mirror and say, 'Michal, you're Left Wing,' she was facing a major crisis of faith, because her religious identity and her political identity were one and the same. However, that moment, almost fifteen years after the event that sparked the process, when she clarified her political identity, she was suddenly able hold both identities as separate and yet equally true within herself. She became Left Wing politically, and remained Haredi religiously.

Furthermore, she has come to create a new type of ethical religious personhood which is not counter to progressive political philosophy. As she discussed in the previous section, she relates the progressive philosophy to the religious belief in proactivity in order to bring the messiah; whereas 'sitting and waiting' for the messiah is the conservative mindset, in which nothing will change. She accuses conservative religious types of absolving themselves of responsibility for anything unjust within the world on the basis of their belief in the imminence of the messiah. Yet she suggests that the values of Haredi life are more aligned with the objectives of the Israeli Left Wing parties and the philosophy of the political progressive.

Leadership and Community Work: Changing the Political Consciousness

Michal's transformation, on its own, would be meaningless, an anomaly. Rather, she is simply one example of broad, systemic change that is occurring. Michal is herself very much a motivator for this change; her choice to become a leader was precipitated by her participation in *Lo Nivcharot, Lo Bocharot*, and she has become a leader in multiple ways, but she also recognises the other women who are working for change, as well. Indeed, without encountering other women who were having similar struggles as her, Michal may have never taken her first step into political life.

'So we sat in this circle, about twenty or thirty women, I don't know,' Michal tells me, remembering the circle organised by Esti Shushan which she joined. 'And then it went— you know when they say, "Ok, each person should say a few words about herself, how many kids she has, what animal she would like to be—" so. It wasn't like that. Beginning with the first, each of the participants began to tell her entire life story. Ok, so not two hours, but each spoke about ten minutes. And each really spoke like about what she does and all that, but it

was completely about the question of where she is as a Haredi woman, how it clashes with her wishes, with her career, with her faith— I don't know. And there were stories, each with her own life story, for the good and for the bad. Both amazing stories and— and it took three hours. Then they reached me, and at the time I was deliberating whether to run in the municipal elections in El'ad.'

This was a few years after Michal's realisation of her socialist beliefs. She had joined *Avodah*, but had not yet become politically active in the party.

'And then they reached me and I was the last in the circle,' Michal continued. 'So I said a few words, and then I said, "Ok, I've decided to run." It was at that moment that I decided. Because I suddenly felt that I was not alone. Because that was the issue. And then I said, "Wow, what I am seeing here— I'm not the only one who thinks like this!" And I remember that the strongest thing I received from that circle was that suddenly I understood. Earlier I spoke about the weird, about not wanting to be the weird one. Suddenly you understand that everyone thinks like me. So it wasn't everyone, but there was a whole circle of women and it was like – everybody is having the same thoughts. It wasn't that their political views were like mine but that they were talking about it at all. It's not only politics, it's like— and I think that this experience was shared by everyone. Of women who previously had not spoken to anyone. And then we had lots of sessions like that. It was like a support group. And it doesn't matter what happened with it afterwards. It dissolved, it came together again. Lots of things. But it was— that group was very significant.'

Michal had been so afraid to act on her new ideals for so long; this was nearly twenty years after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, which had begun it all for her. The simple act of joining this circle, hearing others confess critiques of Haredi society and being open about their struggles, Michal knew that she was not alone in her internal conflict. She saw other women going through this process: critique of society, picking apart their own individualism

from the Haredi unified identity of politics and religion. This gave her the strength to decide to take the risk to run for office within her community.

'And then when I ran in El'ad,' Michal continues, 'afterwards it was a type of coming out. I am a Haredi woman and I'm involved in politics. It was for the local council. It was the first time that a Haredi woman had run, really the first time. …In El'ad it was an independent list.'

Though she had joined *Avodah* by this time, and was becoming more active in leadership there, the Labour Party had no presence in the all-Haredi city of El'ad. Michal ran as an independent, not associated with any party; she did not win. She says she never intended to.

'Because that was my intention to begin with,' she says, to my question about her lack of success. 'Even when I ran in El'ad I said, let's make a stop on the way.'

Michal knew she would not be able to win; she ran for municipal council simply because she wanted to break the barrier, and create a precedent. Someone had to be the first Haredi woman to run for municipal council, and Michal decided she would take on that role. Winning did not matter; running was an end in itself. This outlook is similar to Esti's position in the previous chapter that a women's movement, like *Nivcharot*, must come before a woman's party, like *Ubizchutan*. Like Esti, Michal has a conception of the long-term project of change.

'Even today there are no female Haredi council members anywhere,' she explains. 'There were none and there are none. Nothing. Ruth Colian wanted to run but didn't in the end. Racheli Ifenboim wanted to run and didn't in the end. … This time there was Pnina Pfeuffer in Jerusalem. Who didn't run in the end. There were several Haredi women but none got in. Unbelievable.'

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ruth wanted to run for municipal council in Petach Tikvah, but ultimately she did not get enough signatures. Racheli Ifenboim is a Gurer woman

who ran for municipal council in Jerusalem, but ultimately withdrew before the election due to community pressure. Pnina Pfeuffer is another Haredi woman who is a member of *Avodah*, and she was also pressured not to run in Jerusalem.

'Through the Haredi parties it is impossible,' Michal continues, 'and don't think it's that easy even through the non-Haredi parties. I had a friend in Kfar Yona [a mixed city of both religious and secular Jews] who wanted to run for the local elections in Kfar Yona and she nearly got into one of the non-religious lists, but they simply didn't want her there. In the party, some of the non-religious members said: We don't want you on the list. Like, you have several representatives, there are several Shas representatives… we don't care about your problems, we won't put another Haredi woman in the council and then you'll vote with the Haredim. Like, tomorrow we'll want to open a Reform synagogue – how will you vote? And then they sort of said: the issue of not having Haredi women on the list. Why should I be the one to replace you? Not everyone says it but there everyone said it.'

In Kfar Yona, Michal's friend was unable to run with the non-religious party ultimately because they did not believe she would honour the party's values over her own religious ethics. The non-religious party did not want to disrupt the balance of power on the city council between the secular and the religious by including a Haredi woman on their list. This serves to upset the representation offered by Bina previously, that Haredi women can simply run with Left Wing parties. Rather, there is great distrust within the Left of anyone religious, and this is something which Michal and others have had to overcome.

'And with Pnina Pfeuffer in Jerusalem it was the same story,' Michal adds. 'Because when they united – her party dissolved and then they put her in another party. And they did not assign her a realistic place on purpose because they didn't want any trouble with the Haredi parties. What do you think? It's the same story now with Omer Yankelevich. They don't let her open her mouth because they don't want any trouble with the Haredi parties. And

even when she does speak she says, “No, I won't speak about Haredi issues.” In the few sentences she did say, she didn't even say the word Haredim. She said, in the clip where she was given two sentences, “I represent Israel's social periphery.” Because she didn't want any trouble with the Haredi parties. Simply unbelievable.’

Like Pnina and Racheli, Omer has also been pressured politically. She was formerly a member of *Tkuma*, and was then a member of the Blue and White, but in both situations the party of which she has been a member has felt it more urgent to preserve the relationship with the Haredi parties, with whom they often form a coalition. Omer and Pnina, beyond feeling pressure individually from the Haredi parties, have also seen the parties of which they are members succumb to pressure from the Haredi parties. Yet Michal recognises the leadership and roles of these women, and the steps they have made in opening politics to Haredi women.

‘And from then on I really think about saying, speak out,’ Michal says. ‘Like, speak out and you will discover that your neighbour shares your thoughts. But it’s the hardest thing. Even today it’s hardest to talk to your neighbour. Harder than speaking in the newspaper. Like, I can't explain it. For me, not for everyone. For me personally. It’s always the hardest. It’s the hardest with the family… Because with them you don't want to develop a confrontation. But funnily enough, if you speak out, then – it’s not that you will agree about everything, but suddenly you understand that on many issues you think the same.’

Michal understands both the power of leadership, and the pressure of the community. She did not speak honestly about her political beliefs for decades within her family, for fear of creating conflict. She knows others feel the same and fear they are alone. The women’s circle run by Esti Shushan helped Michal to see that she was not the only person who questioned the community structure and the expectations of the religious identity which is also a political identity, and this gave her the confidence to run for office. By running for office and taking other leadership roles, she knows she is allowing other Haredim who harbour private

critiques to see that they are not alone. Her newfound confidence in her political identity, which she can hold within her and still maintain a religiously Haredi identity, creates a new example of Haredi personhood for others.

'And then all of this, it was also an opportunity to get to know the entire sphere of Haredi social activists,' Michal says, 'both men and women, who are introducing lots of changes within Haredi society. And it sort of pulled me back home…. It like really took me back, like a little, into struggles within Haredi society. And I think that today I am sort of one foot there and one here. And I think that my contribution to this entire story of the Haredi activists … may really be first of all talking about the political aspects. Because most people occupy themselves with the civil areas – education …, employment, sexual abuse, etc. So the discourse focuses a great deal on civil society, and making the political connection is something that— today it's done more often. But I made that connection from the beginning. And also the issues of – you know, when talking about solutions – to bring the social-democrat solutions, that's very significant.

'Oh no, before that also – do you remember the social-democrat course [at the *Knesset*]? So we held it for Haredim. We have already had four mixed groups of both male and female Haredim. …We have more than one hundred graduates.'

Michal now runs classes designed specifically for Haredim to become educated about social democracy within Israel. These classes are non-partisan classes run by the *Knesset* to promote understanding of the government and help Haredi people begin to understand how to form their own perspectives on politics and political participation.

'Something else about the New Haredim [the New Middle Class] is that they say, "Okay, I'm no longer in the Haredi parties,"' Michal explains. 'So suddenly you start thinking about other things. "So, wait a minute, am I Left or Right?" I sort of think that I gave them that option. Both those who are more serious, and the sixteen year olds who think – "Wait a

minute, am I Left Wing?" It's sort of saying, you can be both religious and Left. It's like giving an option, that's the most important.'

Michal knows that her leadership allows the possibility of imagining oneself as both Haredi and Left Wing. She recognises that young people, and even adults, will see her leadership and realise that it is ok to feel politically progressive, Left Wing, or Socialist.

'Then we founded the Haredi group in *Avodah*,' Michal concludes. 'That's something, too. That's what I was saying about options.'

This group includes Michal and Pnina, among others, including Haredi men. There are left-wing Haredi leaders emerging. These people are not, however, completely ostracised, and the broader mission of developing a political consciousness is not an anathema to the Haredi mainstream institutions.

'These days I sit on panels,' Michal tells me. She is part of a group of religious women politicians, from all political perspectives, who are invited to speak at seminaries and women's academic programs. The mission of the group is simply to develop independent thought around political issues. The group speaks at Haredi institutions, but also at Chardal and *Dati Leumi* institutions. Within these religious Zionist institutions, it is sometimes even more difficult to imagine being Left Wing.

'I'm constantly being sent… to all the West Bank settlements,' Michal says with amusement. 'It seems that no one wants to go. Last week I was in Ariel, Kfar Edumim, and Ma'ale Edumim. Teens, that's the hardest. High school students. For them everything is black or white. It's crazy. And really like, in Ma'ale Edumim, every time I came: booing. You start. Yelling in the audience. The principal was shocked. At one stage the principal took the microphone and said, "Please respect everyone here. They came to speak to us and you will respect them." And then when he finished I took the microphone and said, "Yell, yell, it's okay. That's politics." It was really funny. In Ariel I actually said that to them – Oh, no, not in

Ariel, first I was at the Efrata college. Do you know about the Efrata college? All the [all-female] students have these tall kerchiefs. Very West Bank. All settlers. I don't know. It's like very Chardali. So I'm sitting there. It was also the people who were sitting in the panel. To my left was Orit Strook [*Tkuma* and *Bayit haYehudi*], to my right Shuli Mualem [*Bayit haYehudi* and *HaYemin HaChedash*, the New Right], and then a few more Right Wing [types]. All religious, all women, and all Right Wing, and me – *Avodah*. So I started by saying to them, "Girls, I having nothing to say to you, I don't want to convince you, nothing. I just want to say that it's possible, you can be both religious and Left Wing." And it was a crazy panel, really far out. But I think that is what it means. It's giving the option. Not only for religious people. In certain places in the periphery, not everywhere, I mean, calling someone left-wing is a curse."

Michal knows her leadership, and the leadership of others like her, will break down the entanglement of religious and political identities which has grown so complex in the religious world, and not only in the Haredi sector. Michal understands that leadership is about examples, and that by seeing examples, she is allowing change to happen, though it may be invisible and likely will not have an impact for many years. She is helping others to pick apart their political identities from their religious identities. By offering an alternative and allowing the world to see the possibility of a Haredi woman who is also politically independent, she is imagining a new future for the Haredi world, for the greater religious world, and therefore for Israel.

Going Far Right

Not everyone who undergoes this process of picking apart their identities resolves into a Leftist. Some move the other way, towards the Israeli Right Wing. The threads of secularism

include, after all, skeins of Fascism as much as they do the Left Wing values discussed above. The resurgence of the Right, in Israel as elsewhere, has arisen from a confoundment of nationalism and the state (Asad 2003, 177). When one must be nationalistic in order to ethically and morally participate in the polity, the Right flourishes. Dalsheim (2019), Lavie (2018), and Shohat (2017) all suggest that Zionism is fundamental to participation and inclusion in the state of Israel. This is complicated by the conundrum of secularism: the secular project seeks to both value the individual (and individual 'rights' therein), *and* it seeks to be collectivist in its morals, ethics, and values (Asad 2003, 178). Thus, secular democracies struggle to escape a majority, which the state has perpetuated and perpetuates the state, and which dominates all other minorities. In the current state of Israel, *Dati Leumi*, Religious Zionism, has become the dominant majority, and Haredim remain a minority (Dalsheim 2019, 190). The *Dati Leumi* are probably most aptly compared to the Islamist movements which parallel these changes in Muslim post-colonial countries (Asad 2003, 195-200), in that extreme nationalism is combined with religion to generate new types of religious personhood.

Though *Dati Leumi* identity is fundamentally opposite to formations of Haredi identity more than a century ago, it is nonetheless a close relative to the Haredim, as it still includes fairly strict religious observance (which naturally varies across the population). Due to the changes discussed extensively in Chapter Four, the National Religious community has become less of a pariah within certain parts of the Haredi world, especially the New Haredi Middle Class. Furthermore, *ba'alei teshuvah* are part of this shift in acceptance of certain aspects of National Religious life; for as they introduce this idea of a religious identity which is separate from the political, they also introduce ideologies in which they wish religion to be more a part of the Jewish state (Dalsheim 2019, 131-135). Ruth Colian's support of the Nation State Law in the last chapter reflects this, as does her interest in applying

uncompromising Haredi values to the administration of the nation. Indeed, secular parents in Israel today are sometimes more concerned about their child becoming religious for the political implications, than for the religious aspects— though generally they are more open to see their children become *Dati* than to become Haredi (Ibid., 69). Today, the expected way to be a member of the Israel polity is to be Jewish, Zionist, and religious (Ibid.). This necessarily makes one a member of the political Right (Asad 2003, 177).

The re-integration of religion into national identity in Israel is attractive to Haredim, because it seems to be a triumph of religion (Dalsheim 2019, 196). Ultimately, though, this is actually a triumph of the state projects, and nationalist ideologies (Ibid.). Remember, as Shohat (2017) and Lavie (2018) have argued, to be Israeli is to be not Arab. Thus, the 'moral panic' of Trump and the Muslim ban become attractive to building a Zionist identity (Asad 2018, 142-143), and the liberal value of equality is transformed into the neoliberal idea of the 'right to compete on equal terms' (Ibid., 26-27). Certain authoritarian outlooks are justified through liberal values, and the Right becomes a product of secular liberalism.

One of the most significant state projects of the neoliberal Right in Israel (Dalsheim 2019) is the proliferation of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank. Haredim started moving to settlements in the West Bank in the 1990s. The Haredi community was in desperate need of affordable housing, and the state offered them new cities in four different settlements: Beitar Illit, Modi'in Illit, Tel Zion, and Emanuel (Cahaner 2017, 112-113). The state offer was initially viewed with ambivalence, as living over the Green Line suggested a problem for Haredi opposition to political Zionism (Ibid., 114-115). However, most Haredi leaders ultimately embraced the option, not least because it was the first time that the state had recognised Haredi self-segregation as legitimate (Ibid., 115). However, this was a single instance in which the interests of the religious minority corresponded with the very different interests of the secular state; ultimately, this made the

Haredim into a tool for the state's neoliberal expansionist project (Ibid.). Rather than the Haredi high fertility being a burden on the state, the state could transform this fertility for its own interests.

Despite the fact that the majority of Haredi people who move to the settlements imbue their choice with no political significance, the move to the settlements is accredited with shifting Haredi politics to the Right (Cahaner 2017, Dalsheim 2019). Essentially, the move to the settlements is seen as a process to 'radicalise' the Haredi populace (Cahaner 2017, 119). Dalsheim notes that in her recent research in Jerusalem, Haredi individuals were now heavily involved in the Temple Institute, and extreme Right Religious Zionist organisation (associated with the Chardal not the *Dati Leumi*) which seeks to regain the Temple Mount area for Jewish use (Dalsheim 2019, 73).

I would suggest, however, that there are more complex reasons at play both for the choices Haredi people make to move to the settlements, and the reasons for their sympathies with Right Wing political movements. Just as the choice to wear the veil and make obvious one's religious identity is a form of resistance to secularism by provoking secular anxieties (Nilüfer 2010, 257-258), so are certain choices on the fringes of Haredi life a form of resistance. The non-Haredi settlements are known for their openness and acceptance to Jews who otherwise have trouble integrating into Jewish religious communities (Egorova 2015, 499). While this serves the Zionist ideal of The Ingathering (Shohat 2017), it nonetheless offers real alternatives to certain people who struggle in Haredi communal living. In addition, many Mizrahim were forced into moving to the settlements for the cheap housing, like the Haredim (and indeed there may well be overlap between the two), and because the Right made this possible, they now feel a certain loyalty to the politics of the parties who made it possible for them to have a higher quality of life (Lavie 2018, 66-68). These complexities seem more relevant to the women whose words I share below. Though I did speak with

women who lived in Haredi-only settlements like Beitar and Tel Zion, the women featured below all lived in non-Haredi-specific settlements. They also exhibited ethics and values that were Haredi, but political identities which were Right, sometimes perhaps Far Right.

'I was so proud,' Shaindel offered, out of the blue, as we were sitting outside a building where a rehearsal was about to begin. 'Last night there was a problem at the edge of [the settlement in the West Bank where she lives], and my oldest son, he's eighteen now, going to *kollel* after *Simchas Torah*, he didn't hesitate: he grabbed the rifle to join his father and the other men. He and his friends have new ideas that they're trying to make happen where we live.'

This was the first time I encountered a Haredi woman talking about actively participating in violence, specifically violence against Palestinians, in the context of the settler movement. Once I had a chance to process what Shaindel was telling me, I started to be concerned. Was Shaindel not Haredi? Maybe she identified as Chardal? I needed to understand better what was going on in Shaindel's family, and with her identity. I asked her why they moved to the settlement.

'We wanted that freedom,' she explains, 'but it was the best decision we ever made as a family. We love our community and our neighbours, and my husband loves *davening* by their *shul* on *shabbos*. But we sent them [the children] to school in Jerusalem. My husband still learns by his rav in the *yeshiva* here [in Jerusalem]. We wanted them at a *hashkafically* Haredi school. We are Haredi, but we love where we live.'

Shaindel's choice to refer to the synagogue in the settlement as 'their' *shul*, rather than 'our' *shul*, serves to underscore her sense of Haredi identity as separate from the identity of her neighbours, who are majority Chardali. She is conscious of her choice and purposefully pursues maintaining the Litvish Haredi religious identity of her family and her children through the Haredi religious educational institutions in Jerusalem, but she has allowed herself

to explore other aspects of her identity based on where she lives. I asked about the pride she feels for her sons, and the 'new ideas' that her oldest son is espousing. It seems he is particularly enamoured of a particular young rabbi in the settlement who preaches the expansion of Jewish settlements into the area 'from the Jordan River to the Euphrates.' This is a biblically rationalised extreme version of Zionism which is espoused only by Far Right groups like the Jewish Defense League. Shaindel, so purposefully committed to a religious identity established by *hashkafically* Haredi institutions, is proud of her son who is at the very least sympathetic with political groups classified by Israel as terrorist organisations, if not actually one himself. Shaindel, like Michal, has disentangled her political identity from her religious identity, though unlike Michal, she has politically found sympathy with the Far Right, rather than the Left Wing socialists.

Shaindel was not the only person I encountered who had gravitated to the right politically. Grune is a Breslever Hasidic woman, and an *aguna*, a woman who is waiting for her husband to grant her a Jewish divorce, a *gett*. Grune grew up within the very devout Hasidic community of Breslev in Mea Shearim. She is the fourth of nine children, all daughters, and she met her husband once before marrying him when she was eighteen. He learns in the Breslev *yeshiva* in Mea Shearim. The Breslev are an unusual Hasidic sect, and they are often ostracised by the rest of the Hasidic groups, because they currently lack a rebbe. Many Breslev are 'messianic' Breslevers, who believe that their deceased rebbe is the messiah. Some Breslev are Chardali, rather than Haredi. The community in Mea Shearim, however, is the most pure type of Breslev, strictly adhering to only the traditional *chassidus*, and they firmly resist Zionism. Grune was raised within this purist Breslev community, and her husband with whom she made a *shidduch* was equally as parochial a Breslever.

'He was very *shtark*,' she tells me, using the Yiddish word for extreme religious observance. 'More *shtark* than I realised when we made the *shidduch*. Too *shtark*.'

Whereas in most Hasidic households, women manage the finances, and have some independence when running their own households, Grune said her husband became very controlling after marriage, asking her how she spent every shekel. ‘We weren’t rich, but I wasn’t spending stupidly,’ she tells me. ‘And it only got worse after my first son was born.’

Grune said that her husband’s intensity and strictness translated into severe and unrealistic expectations for her sons’ achievements in school. She tells me that it was most difficult for her oldest son; while the others felt the pressure, all of her husband’s focus fell on the oldest boy.

‘No matter what he did, it wasn’t enough,’ Grune says. ‘And so he didn’t have the power in himself to do well. No belief in himself. And he became a more and more difficult student.’

When her oldest son was sixteen, he dropped out of *yeshiva*. Grune’s husband kicked him out of the house.

‘I knew then, it was my choice to make, my children or my husband,’ Grune says. ‘But I had eleven children by then, and the youngest was only six months old. It wasn’t easy to just leave him.’

Grune made a plan on her own, without the help of any of the community organisations that exist to assist women in abusive marriages. She is a musician, and I met her through other musicians; she knew some women who were Chardali Breslevers and musicians, living with their family in a settlement.[26] For six months, she saved shekels by buying a cheaper chicken for *shabbos* without her husband knowing; she gave half of what she saved to her son, who was still living on the street. At the end of six months, she took eight of her ten children onto a bus one evening while her husband was studying at the *yeshiva*, and she went

[26] Breslev have many splinter groups. Some Breslever groups are more Chardal, rather than Haredi (Cahaner 2017, 113), and some participate in aggressive expansionist settler movements, as will be discussed. The Breslev group in Mea Sharim, in which Grune was raised, is very Haredi and will have nothing to do with the Chardal Breslev groups.

to the settlement, and her friends' house. She stayed with her friends for a week, and then the settlement leaders found a way to move her and her children into a trailer on the settlement.

'And then my son came home,' she tells me with tears in her eyes.

The two children whom she left at home were her next oldest boys. She wanted them to continue their *yeshiva* studies, which they would not be able to do in the settlement. Her second oldest, a girl, helped her coordinate the move to the settlement; she has recently married a young Chardali Breslever in the settlement community. Her statement that her oldest son came home is a mild exaggeration; he now lives rough on hilltops in the West Bank.

'I am very, very proud of him,' she tells me. 'He has fire back in him now.'

Her son has, essentially, become one of the so-called Hilltop Youth. These are disorganised bands of teenagers, often *yeshiva* and high school drop-outs. They, and others like them, participate in so-called 'Price Tag Attacks' in which they vandalise Palestinian property and sometimes attack people bodily (Dalsheim 2019, 69). They are radicalised; Dalsheim suggests that they participate in a form of 'anti-Zionism' which suggests that the state doesn't always have the best interests of the Jewish people at heart (Ibid., xiv). Tzfadia offers a gentler interpretation, suggesting that they adhere to a very radicalised version of their parents' National Religious ideology (Tzfadia 2017, 102). I believe the truth lies somewhere in the middle of these two interpretations: they are radicalised, anti-state terrorists who adhere to an extreme interpretation of Zionism. They perpetrate violence against both Palestinians and the IDF, who are often called upon to force them to abandon these make-shift forts which they create. Grune's son was nineteen at the time of our conversations, but she would prefer he continue his activities within these extreme groups, rather than serving in the IDF.

'I tell him to call me from a friend's phone before he comes home now, in case the army

police are looking for him,' Grune says. They may be looking for him on criminal charges associated with his Hilltop activities, as well as his draft dodging, though she does not admit this.

Grune is proud of her son, and happy to live in a Chardali, somewhat aggressively violent settlement, while maintaining her Haredi identity. She still speaks Yiddish at home, though she has improved her Modern Hebrew skills over the years she has lived in the West Bank. She wants her sons to learn in the *yeshiva* of the Breslevers in Mea Shearim; though she worries about her next two older sons, especially given the pressure they feel from their father, she tells me that she is happy that they are doing what they should be doing as Hasidic men. She is unsure of how her two youngest sons will be educated, though she would prefer they attend Haredi institutions. They are currently aged ten and four, and attend the local branch of Talmud Torah, which is *hashkafically* National Religious.

I ask her about her daughters' education and *shidduchim*.

Grune laughs. 'For girls it makes no difference,' she tells me. 'Who cares about their school? First you are *maidele* [little girl] and then you are *veib* [wife].'

Grune suggests that the differences between streams of Orthodox Judaism only matter for men, who must learn; for women, there is no difference because all Jewish women are wives and mothers first. Yet, her insistence on maintaining Yiddish in the home, and indeed the Yiddish she uses to converse with me, suggests that she maintains a Haredi identity for herself, while living in a Chardali settlement.

Grune represents the bottom fringe of Haredi society, which Michal described in her description of the class breakdown of Haredim. Her son is a drop-out and she is an *aguna*, two markers of exclusion from the Haredi mainstream. Her identity is also fragmenting, but this is a result of social exclusion, deprivation, and trauma; in order to find a way to be proud of her son, she is happy to embrace his Far Right tendencies. Her daughters face a great

disadvantage within the Haredi *shidduch* system, and so she is happy to see them make matches within the Chardali community, because at least they will then have the chance to fulfil their roles as women by becoming wives and mothers. Shaindel, in contrast, has been more purposeful in her choices and her maintenance of her Haredi identity, while embracing the ideology of her chosen community. Both represent ways in which the Haredi world is fragmenting into the Far Right; these choices also need to be considered when imagining the future of the Haredi world in Israel.

Clearly, Grune and Shaindel are extreme examples in their Far Right beliefs. They have both unravelled their religious identities from their political identities, like Michal. Though Grune was somewhat forced into this situation, she uses what agency she does possess to maintain the threads of her Haredi identity, through using Yiddish in the home, and prioritising her sons' *yeshiva* study. Shaindel's unravelling and re-knitting was done more purposefully, and is bound up with her critique of the suffocating nature of Haredi community living. She has adopted extreme Right yarns into her political identity block in her scarf, which is perhaps what makes her an exceptional example. There is, however, a gradual tendency towards the Right and Zionist ideology in the mainstream of the Haredi world, and the process is no different, if less extreme. This is a significant result of the move of the Haredim to West Bank settlements; when the Haredim became a tool of the expansionist project, they also became open to the influences of the conflict which they had thus far avoided (Dalsheim 2019). When questions about state security became relevant to the safety of Haredim, then it became almost necessary to invest in certain Right Wing ideologies; and if given a choice between a Zionist and an anti-Zionist, the mainstream Haredim must choose the Zionist who will prioritise the safety of Haredi lives in the settlements.

Political and Social Futures: Diverse Haredi Politics

In this chapter, we have examined Michal's and Shaindel's processes of picking apart their enmeshed Haredi political and religious identities, creating new types of Haredi ethical personhood in which Haredi religious values can coexist alongside a spectrum of political beliefs and identities. Michal has suggested that the progressive and conservative political philosophical spectrum is rooted in deep theological differences; those who invest in human agency in order to achieve redemption engage in progressive philosophical processes, while those who remove their own agency based on a belief in preordination are more suited to conservative political thinking.

This reflects the deep philosophical differences discussed in the previous chapter between Esti and Ruth. Ruth invests in the purity of Haredi values, refusing to work with non-Haredi groups in order to, as she puts it, secure the trust of the Haredi women she hopes to serve. This viewpoint extends to her overall political perspective, in which she applies Haredi values to the nation as a whole, and how she believes a 'Jewish' state should govern its people. Ruth has, essentially, maintained the unity of her political and religious identity; she is philosophically liberal only in the limited ways in which her feminist ideology is not in conflict with her traditional Haredi ethical personhood.

Esti is more willing to cooperate with other groups, and work outside the Haredi value structure in order to achieve her feminist goals. She and Michal also share a similar outlook about recognising the difference between religion and the state, and separating their Haredi identity and values from how the country should be governed. This suggests that the liberal ideology of 'substitutability' has entered into the value system of Michal and Esti: substitutability is the belief that each voter has equal rights to their beliefs in a democratic system (Asad 2013, 18). Michal believes, for instance, that there should be public transportation on Shabbat, and civil marriage equality for all couples, including same-sex. In

fact, Michal suggests that there should be mandatory civil marriage available to all people within Israel, and that each couple can then pursue a religious marriage according to their beliefs as they see fit.

In order to be comfortable with this, it is necessary to have done the work which Michal has, of picking apart one's political beliefs from one's religious identity. However, this picking apart does not necessarily lead one to progressive political attitudes, as Shaindel's situation has illustrated. Shaindel has picked apart her religious identity from her political attitudes in order to embrace Far Right Zionist politics and practices, while maintaining Haredi religious values and ethics. Shaindel also believes in the imminence of the messiah, and so Michal's suggestion that the conservative outlook aligns with this type of messianic thinking perhaps holds, though Shaindel also embraces a certain amount of human agency in her understanding of bringing redemption; she, however, sees the agency of Jews living in the areas of Judea and Samaria as one of the components which bring redemption. In this agency, too, we see that Zionist messianism is not necessarily the 'sit-and-wait' ideology of the conservatives of the Haredi world. This is her Zionist political viewpoint; it is fundamentally Right Wing, but it is not necessarily conservative. It is liberal in its source and values, and Right in its orientation. Shaindel, like Ruth, would encourage more religious values be included in the administration of the nation state, because Jewish religious ethics are necessarily entwined with her nationalism.

Ultimately, these differences will all become part of the spectrum of approaches within the Haredi community; Haredi will have many strands, rather than the stringently driven unity under which the Haredi world was formed in the twentieth century. There will be Haredi ethics which will permeate each of these strands, but there will be increasingly diverse approaches to Haredi identity politically and socially. A mainstream Haredi establishment will endure; while this population will resist social change conservatively, but will

nonetheless be changed by the world around it.

'But that's how I raise my children,' Michal says. 'I know that today they still accept it [the Haredi mainstream] but as they grow it becomes a struggle between what they learn at school and what I teach them…. Like, I always tell them— even small things, like that there are secular religious people. What do I mean by secular religious? Like the traditional and all that, that there are all kinds of ways of being religious and that a woman can wear pants but be religious. And also about, let's say, non-Jews and Jews. I also talk to them about Muslims, I explain to them. I mean – I don't explain the entire theology but I do explain that there are other religions and all that. But it's bad religious education. I mean, in religious education you're supposed to raise your children to think that this is the truth and everything else is shit. I'll tell you why. Because if you start debating what is the truth then maybe you will end up like me and then they'll turn out non-religious.'

Michal grins.

Esti, however, has seen her daughter rebel against her feminist ideals. 'Still my daughter is taught [in the Chardal school] that the significant destiny of your life is to be a mother, I heard this. And I am afraid that my daughter will buy into this ideology. And she is now about nineteen, and she is trying to find what she is going to study, now that she has done her National Service. Next year she's going to find a course to study in the university and she has all the opportunities open, not like me, I had nothing! But she's very confused. She told me something that hurt me a little bit. She told me, "Why do you try to fulfil your dreams through me? Like, you had your dreams, and you cannot fulfil them, and you are looking at me and wanting me to fulfil them." I told her, "You don't have to fulfil any dream of mine, I just want you to do your best because I know your skills, I know what you can do." But it's something that I'm thinking about. It's always that the next generation has to rebel against their parents and you cannot ignore that. I told them, all the things they can do before they

have children, but maybe they didn't appreciate it. … If it was just her, she would prefer to get married now, and to become a mother. But I told her, "You cannot get married now. You have to learn something, just to start, to see the world."'

Esti's daughter wants a traditional life for herself, but even with her rebellion, she has participated in National Service, something not many Haredi women do. Esti's oldest son was serving in the army at the time of research, and she said he has always wanted to do so. Of course these choices are influenced by the schools which Esti's children attended; they were excluded from Haredi schools because of her activism. However, Bina suggests that Haredi service in the Army is not such an unbelievable concept.

'Look, when they instituted the Haredi draft, they made a big mistake,' she tells me, reflecting on the upheaval in 2017 surrounding the *Knesset* attempts to end army exemptions for the Haredi world. 'If they had come to the rabbis first, they would have found out how easy it could have been to work something out. It's not that far off, Haredim in the army! Many of us are not necessarily that against it. Look, we *chose* to move to this country. We could have stayed in New York, we were fine there, we weren't unhappy. So it's not like we don't get that at some point we may have to do our part. But the people in the *Knesset* who wanted this to happen didn't even approach us. They didn't come to Shas, or the *aguda* [Agudas Yisrael], or any of the great *rabbanim*— it just shows why they did it. They didn't do it because they really wanted the Haredim in the army, they did it to turn the Haredim into another scapegoat again.'

Bina suggests that the institution of the Haredi draft was a political move rather than an action on the plan to integrate Haredim into Israeli society. Ultimately, it created the Haredim as an enemy, an 'other', in the eyes of the secular and National Religious communities in Israel, and did not serve to significantly increase Haredi enlistment. Bina would say that it was never meant to increase enlistment. However, many Israelis believe Haredi enlistment is

the key to Haredi integration into mainstream Israeli society. Michal disagrees, as discussed in Chapter Four.

'It's necessary to understand that the true correction needs to be made in the educational system,' Michal declares. 'That's something that we encouraged in our campaign. I mean I really think that the solution—. First of all I have to say, I think that it's not fair, the current situation is not fair. It makes no sense that some people have to enlist and others don't. Let's put that on the table – it's not just and not fair any way you look at it. But there's a matter that if you ask me, like the story with education that we haven't talked about. The Haredi educational system too is outside the Israeli educational system. It's like, if you want to bring us into Israeli society start with the educational system. Until the educational system becomes part of the government system….'

She doesn't finish her thought, and moves on to the next idea.

Reform of the Haredi educational system has already begun; as discussed in Chapter Four, there are new schools which combine better secular studies and *bagrut* preparation with *hashkafically* Haredi religious studies, and these schools are becoming more and more acceptable to Haredi parents. While the reforms of the type which Michal would choose may still be somewhat far off, the pluralisation and fragmentation of the Haredi world that is currently happening will allow more opportunities for these changes to occur in the future. As these strands of the Haredi world become more diverse and wide-ranging, this will also only serve to increase the mixing of Haredim with other streams of religious Jews.

'So in the past, indeed…,' Michal says thoughtfully. 'You know, Rabbi Kook [a Religious Zionist leader] was just like the Rabbi of Gur. He was very *frum*. There was a time when indeed – the Religious Zionists were more "light", Modern Orthodox. The Haredim are ultra-orthodox. But today it's not true because today – you have within Religious Zionism very *frum* and very light, and in the Haredi community it's the same – you have very *frum*

and very light. So the difference is in the attitude to the State. And now that, too, is no longer true, because that, too, has been breached. Because there are Religious Zionists who no longer believe in all the business of the sacred state, and there are Haredim who are becoming more Zionist. So everything has become… it's getting mixed up. It's very very complex.'

In many ways, the Haredi world is changing to be more reflective of the type of religious life that existed before the Second World War. Michal is correct: the Religious Zionist movement and the creation of the Haredi identity throughout the nineteenth century were never very far distant; often, within a single family one brother became a Zionist leader and one brother became an *aguda* rabbi, as discussed in Chapter Two. Today, the Religious Zionist world is facing similar types of increasing stringencies involving the erasure of women, and increasing emphasis on modest dress. Meanwhile, the Haredi world has become less clearly resistant to the State and Zionism. Furthermore, there is a possibility now for adoption of left-wing, socialist, and progressive ideologies while maintaining religious ethical personhood. The distinctions and categories of the past are gradually being rendered more and more irrelevant and obsolete as people embrace complexities in their own identities, in their lives, and in their communities.

Though both the Right and the Left are products of the liberal secular democratic state, the two choices have very different implications. Michal's Leftism believes in pluralism; though we have yet to envision how true pluralism may be achieved (Mahmood 2016), her pursuit of this ideal results in conversations between those with disparate minority agendas, and political action against violence and war. Shaindel, Grune, and their sons' Far Right choices result in deaths of Palestinians. Even those who are less extreme still participate in Right Wing politics which seek to displace non-Jewish people within the boundaries of the Israeli nation-state. This fundamental, practical difference must matter in considering the future of the Haredim and the future of Israel. These anecdotes are not inconsequential; in

2013, about 15% of Haredim in Israel live in the Occupied Territories, and about 30% of the settlers living in the West Bank were Haredi (Cahaner 2017, 113). Today, that number is much, much higher. Furthermore, Haredi decisions about the Left and the Right contribute to the future role of religion in the state of Israel. Will the Haredim who lean Right, and who wish to apply religious values to the nation, become a more significant voting force? Those who think like Michal are in the minority presently. Those who are more like Ruth and Shaindel are the natural political allies of the National Religious, and together they form a formidable force in determining the future role of religion and the state. As the Haredim approach 16% of the Israeli population by 2030 ('Statistical Report' 2018, 4-5), these are not insignificant questions.

Conclusions

This chapter has concerned the process of picking apart the religious and political aspects of identity which is happening for so many in the Haredi world. It is the result of negotiation of state pressures and secular exposures; there are multiple reasons for which people choose to subscribe to certain secular ethics, and the ethnography explored herein illustrates why the secular and the religious are not mutually exclusive. Women are at the centre of these negotiations, as the mediators of the secular and the religious. Their acts of knitting in secular strands in the scarf of Haredi society can be considered a liberalising process. These liberalising processes do not necessarily produce 'Liberal' Haredim; rather, the same liberal secular processes lead some Haredim to align themselves with either the Left or the Right. In picking apart their politics from their Haredi identities, some Haredim choose to view their religious identity on parity with other forms of identity, and do not feel that their religious ethics should be applied universally to the state. They invest in the secular concept of religion as separate from the state. Others, especially those who choose Right Wing Zionism, wish to

further enmesh the religious in the national, and wish the state to function in alignment with religious ethics. This chapter shows how the constant negotiation of religious ethics with the state and the secular has produced new types of Haredi political identities which pose significant questions for the future of the state of Israel.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that the Haredi identity formed as one in which the political was entwined with the religious in order to resist secularism, but that through decades of negotiation with the state, the political is being separated from the religious and there are emerging a range of Haredi political identities. At the centre of these processes of negotiation are Haredi women; their roles as protectors of the faith and mediators with the outside world give them agency to direct this negotiation. I imagine this negotiation as a form of knitting, in which strands of secular yarn are slipped into the Haredi scarf; sometimes, this allows women to unravel and re-knit whole sections of the scarf. I began my exploration of Haredi identity in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, and ended my discussion in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank today. Between these two places and times, I have covered a wide range of territory, literally and figuratively.

I have argued that the roots of Haredi identity came from the organisation of the religious world against the *Haskallah* and the Zionist movements. In order to protect religious tradition, leaders had to participate in the political system, and thus formed *Agudat Yisrael*, an organisation that was both political party and religious institution. At the same time, the concept of *Da'as Torah* became a way of extending rabbinical authority over all aspects of life; thus, rabbis could become political leaders because Torah wisdom provided wisdom in all things. When religious leaders became political, then religious identity became political. This was exacerbated after the formation of the state of Israel. Haredim operated as a minority in defence of their own interests, and there occurred a gradual increase in stringency of interpretation of Jewish laws and traditions. The Haredim needed to distinguish themselves from the Jews who now surrounded them in the state; they also needed to defend purity of

religious interpretation from Zionist influences. The Haredim are not anti-Zionist, but they are not Zionist. They do not include participation in the Israeli state-making project in their observance of Judaism; they do not say Hallel on Independence Day. But only the fringe extremists are anti-Zionist. Generally, Haredim are non-Zionist. This negotiation in protection of religious ethics from Zionist incursion led to an emphasis on *yeshiva* study for men, both because of the losses of the Holocaust, but also because *yeshiva* study meant not serving in the army. For women, the increase in stringency has meant stricter modesty standards; in fact, Haredi piety is constructed around modest docile bodies which are shaped into religiously ethical interiors. This emphasis on modesty has specific implications for Haredi women who are not Ashkenazi; ethnically different modes of dress and comportment became grounds for prejudice and discrimination. Women also must be wives and mothers who support their husbands in *yeshiva* study, which meant more secular education and jobs in the secular world. Thus Haredi life continued until around the end of the first decade of this century.

In the new millennium, certain changes began to have significant influence on Haredi life. Women's secular education had improved, but men's secular education has weakened, and this created a gender crisis in the home. Furthermore, men were in a crisis of masculinity (Stadler 2009). The rabbis therefore have begun to encourage more secular education for men, including a range of options for Haredi boys in *hashkafically* Haredi schools with more secular studies, and by working to open the Haredi campuses of major universities. This move represented a negotiation with secular knowledge, to allow more into the community in order to maintain religious society. It also represented a negotiation with the state, which seeks to transform Haredi men into productive, working citizens (Dalsheim 2019). Another change that created more opportunity for Haredim to negotiate with secular values was the housing crisis with which central Israel has been dealing for the last several decades; Haredi

communities are generally poor, and housing stock in the areas around Jerusalem and Bnei Brak are in high demand. Haredim were given the option to move to Haredi-only settlements in the West Bank; this represented a negotiation between the values of the religious community and the goals of the state. Haredim sacrificed some of their resistance to Zionism for affordable housing, and in turn the state recognised their right to self-segregate. The Haredim, and their high fertility rates, in turn became a tool for the state expansionist project. Because of the housing crunch, Haredim also moved out of Haredi-only neighbourhoods and into neighbourhoods with Jews who were religious but not Haredi. This allowed Haredim to begin to negotiate new ways of holding religious ethics with secular values and knowledge. The influence of *ba'alei teshuvah* has often been underestimated, but it is significant as well. They view their choice as a purely religious one rather than a political one, and bring with their entrance into the community a wide range of secular middle class values which the Haredi community largely accepts and integrates into religious life for the benefit of the community. These changes have led to the creation of the New Haredi Middle Class, in which families have one or both parents working in white collar jobs outside the home, having earned higher degrees, and therefore bringing home more money. The New Middle Class is accepted, and indeed welcomed, by the mainstream establishment, who rely on them economically to ensure the Haredi community's economic future. Thus, the New Middle Class represents a form of Haredi identity which is a negotiation of both the secular and the religious, and acceptable within Haredi religious ethics.

Haredi women are some of the most prominent agents of change, not least because they are the mediators of secular knowledge for the religious world (Fader 2009). They invest in pious forms of agency, including embodying modesty, and prayer. Yet they use agency to achieve goals of negotiating certain secular values with religious ethics, in order not to secularise Haredi life, but to create a stronger version of Haredi ethics for the future. This

includes the adoption of psychology and therapeutics. They critique their society, their community leaders, and the stringencies of current practice; yet they do not seek to throw off the yolks of patriarchy or the limitations of modesty, and they see certain limits as liberating in religiously ethical ways. Haredi agency works to critique certain aspects of society in order to produce new forms of Haredi identity which represent negotiations of secular and religious values towards a religiously ethical future.

Unsurprisingly, a feminist movement has emerged as a result of improved women's education in the face of increasingly stringent modesty standards. The activists are disproportionately Sephardi and Mizrahi, and they cite the racist discrimination which they encountered in the Haredi world as motivation for their feminist activism. The Haredi Feminist Movement represents a form of feminism in which religious women apply equal-rights feminist values to non-religious aspects of life and society, but do not motivate for feminist change in any religious roles. This differentiates them from other Jewish feminists. They likely benefit from legitimacy and government support in ways which other activist movements have been harmed by the same processes. At the same time, this legitimacy transforms them into a tool of the state's secularising project. The Haredi Feminist Movement is a study in the negotiation of Haredi ethics, state pressure, and secular values. While feminism is by no means accepted in the mainstream parts of the Haredi community, there is nonetheless a shift towards less ambivalence, and the ethnography shows that perhaps more women harbour secret feminism than did almost a decade ago. Thus, the activists are creating change throughout the community, and the community is negotiating with secular feminist values.

In the final chapter, I explored how Haredi people have started to unpick their political identities from the religious ethics of being Haredi. This is happening because of the negotiations which have been the subject of this thesis. Haredim see other ways of being

Jewish, are exposed to more secular knowledge and values, and have inevitably become tools of the state-making project. They begin to view their non-Zionism and religious ethics as part of the greater discourse of the Left; or alternatively they begin to integrate Zionist ideology into their religious ethics, joining the Religious Zionists of the Right. A certain proportion are also influenced by anti-state religious Zionist ideology of the Far Right. These Haredim nevertheless maintain their Haredi-ness; they are *hashkafically* Haredi, not Chardal or *Dati Leumi*. These political splinterings are fundamentally important to the future of the state of Israel.

Paths of Inquiry

This thesis has argued that the Haredi community is splitting into strands; becoming many different political types within the same religious approach. It is undeniably exciting to me to think that this could offer another decade of meaningful research. Whether that will fall to me or others remains to be seen. Nonetheless, certain avenues for exploration have been posed by this thesis which I have not been able to adequately pursue, either because of time or scope or funding.

First of all, I have always thought that the advent of Hasidism should be explored from the perspective of its context in Europe during the Age of Enlightenment. It is fundamentally a democratising movement in Judaism, with the Besht's dictates that all (male) Jews should have access to Jewish texts and learning. As I have just argued, religious Jews have always been in contact with the outside world, the non-Jew, the non-religious-Jew, and the philosophies and trends of thought of their day. To what extent should the Hasidic movement be investigated as the first vestige of reform and secular liberal philosophy? In light of that, how does that change understandings of the conflict with the *misnagdim*? And how does this

influence study of the *Haskallah* and the alliance of Hasidim and *misnagdim*? I fear these questions will have to be left to an historian.

I also neglected to conduct research with men who are activists or artists. I was limited by my own gender and the modesty standards of the community. There are considerable male activist movements; Michal sometimes cooperates with them in her social democracy work. An ethnography of men's activism in the Haredi world in Israel is sorely needed, especially at this moment in time.

Furthermore, I have neglected visual arts in favour of performing arts. That was, to be blunt, a choice I made in order to maintain the feasibility of this project as a one-woman study. There is a wealth of visual art emerging from the Haredi world, by both women and men— and unlike the performing arts, visual art by different genders can be displayed together in the same gallery. In Jerusalem, there is a Haredi art gallery called Shelter Gallery, which is open by appointment. A Hasidic art gallery, Shtetl Gallery, has just opened in Williamsburg, NY, and has regular hours. The paintings and sculptures of women and men are displayed side by side. There are likely many ethnographic avenues to pursue in Haredi visual arts.

I also long for an ethnography of Sephardi and Mizrahi Haredi men. So much of my research with non-Ashkenazi women uncovered racism which as equally rooted in misogyny; what forms do prejudice against non-Ashkenazi men take? How do men resist? Where does their agency lie? Indeed, what forms do Haredi male agency take? So much of men's life is proscribed for them in the Haredi world; men, too, must engage in agency, critique, and resistance.

Finally, I believe that my thesis leaves us crying out for an ethnography of the Far Right in Israel. The Hilltop Youth and Pricetaggers, the Kahanists of the Jewish Defense League, these groups have gotten almost a mystique caché about them in academic writing. We brush

up against the edges of these movements, but it is rare for any of us to go there and do ethnography directly. Scholars can barely even agree whether or not they are extremely Zionist or anti-Zionist. And yet these groups are having more and more of an impact on Israel and Israeli politics. The Jewish Defense League has recently been re-admitted to the *Knesset*. If this work has shown nothing else, it has shown that the fringe does eventually influence the centre. We must do more research at the fringe in order to understand the currents of change in states and societies.

Future Implications

The future political choices of the Haredim are central to the question of the future of Israel. Haredim are not an insignificant minority anymore; they maintain the highest birth rate of any sector of Israeli society, and they will number two million by the end of 2033 ('Statistical Report' 2018, 6). As the last four elections of 2019-2020 have illustrated, the ability to form a government or a coalition can be shifted by a few thousand votes. In the past, Haredim have always voted en bloc for United Torah Judaism or Shas; this is clearly changing as multiple political identities become acceptable in the spectrum of the Haredi world. The Haredim are in a delicate balance at this moment, between staying centrist, or tipping over to the Right, or possibly the Far Right.

This has implications as well for the role of religion in the state and the identity of Israel as Jewish, or pluralistic. Many Haredim who are leaning Right wish to see Haredi religious ethics incorporated into governance of the country, while simultaneously maintaining a secular discourse of 'democracy' and other liberal values. As Asad warns (2018), secularising influences can contribute to fascism as much as they lead to progressive states. Furthermore, with Haredim who hold sympathies with the Right, and the Far Right, advocate

for an even more aggressive approach in the occupation of and expansion in areas left to Palestine in the Oslo Accords and other peace-building brokerages. With Haredim moving Right, the future of Israeli civil society, and the hope for peace in the Holy Land are both thrown into doubt.

There is hope, however, that the choices of some Haredim will drift in the opposite direction. Michal Tchernovitsky is not alone or an anomaly; as my ethnography shows, many harbour sympathies for the Left Wing. Pnina Pfeuffer is also in *Avodah*. As Michal works with the social democracy projects, others hear that it is possible to be religious and Left Wing. Michal, Pnina, and others appear in the media and others see that it is possible. But will it, in the end, make enough of a difference?

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